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ON VIOL AND FLUTE.



ON VIOL AND FLUTE.

BY

EDMUND W. GOSSE.



HENRY S. KING & CO.,

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1873.

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TO

MY FRIEND,

WILLIAM B. SCOTT,

PAINTER AND POET.

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TIL

ALLE MINE VENNER I NORDEN

HILSEN OG TAK.

Er jeg en Sanger, saa bør jeg jo vide
Kjærligheds smigrende Lyst ;
Alt, hvad et Hjerte kan rumme og lide,
Burde jo tolke min Röst !



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ON VIOL AND FLUTE.

AD AUDITOREM.

*TAKE hands with me, dear unknown friend, and find
Some downy hollow, sheltered from the wind,
Where summer meadows overlook the sea,
And let us, in the grass at length reclined,*

*Hold converse, while the melting air around
Is full of golden light and murmuring sound,
And let your soul shine frankly upon me,
And I will tell the best my heart has found.*

*But first hold up against the light your wrist,
Where blue veins hide like unheaven amethyst,
And let me feel that you have bodily fire
And purple that the sacred sun has kissea.*

Ad Auditorem.

*Else, if your blood be chilly, go your way,—
I have no song to sing to you to-day;
The goal to which our lyric hearts aspire
Must be the very core of life in May.*

*The wind that glows about your cool brown throat,
The mists that in the violet distance float,
The sun that dips into the rippling waves,
All chant the lesson I have learned by rote.*

*I clasp, as bees do flowers, with amorous wings,
The spirit of life in moving joyous things;
Where'er desire receives the boon it craves,
A new Athene from my forehead springs.*

*When on the rose-stock a fresh blossom blows,
I live within the young triumphant rose;
I stretch my plumes with new-born butterflies,
And with the yearling linnet's my voice grows.*

*But most I find the answer to my mind
Where men and women live as God designed,
With natural aims, warm loves and sympathies,
By no court-rules or uncouth laws confined.*

*Lovers behind the hay-stacks out of sight,
And peasants dancing in a barn at night,
Rough fishers chanting as they haul the net,
And whistling mowers in the fading light,*

*Slim country girls that chatter hand in hand,
Men singing homewards through the harvest-land,
The fiddler scraping, when the moon has set,
A may-pole ditty for a laughing band,—*

*All these are more than my own life to me;
I haul the moon-shot fishes from the sea,
I fiddle on the village-green, I dance,
I thrill with others in their honest glee.*

*And this is what I choose, and, if you will
To call it higher, I reach higher still;
Whatever joyous gift design or chance
Has given our little round of years to fill,*

*Is mine by love of it; and when I stand
To watch the fingers of a master's hand,
And taste the rich arpeggios, and, ablaze
With florid chords, hear how the fire is fanned;*

*Or by some sweet entablature discern
Old stories at a painter's beck return
And shed their dewy light on our dark days,
I throb with joy, and as I look I learn.*

*And these make up my sum of life's desire,—
To live for ever in the sun's broad fire,
To know and love strong men and shapely girls,
And nobly working till the end aspire.*

*With colour, verse, and harmony to frame
A house of beautiful delights, whose name
May stir the world with pleasure like fine pearls,
Strung on a gold thread gleaming as a flame.*

*There have been sage philosophers who found
That pleasure was a dream, and song mere sound;
They passed, and left us poorer; now, ah me!
I wonder what they dream of underground!*

*For lying in the narrow earth they miss
All consolations of remembered bliss,
The scent of wine, blown air and glowing sea,
The songs we sing, the kisses that we kiss.*

*For us no learning is worth half the lore
Of knowing what the breakers tell the shore;
No' science half so wise as what the bee
Is murmuring while he feels the lily's core.*

*So listen while I tell you my delights
On sunny afternoons and starry nights,
What secrets Love has whispered low to me,
And what I know of Nature's mystic rites.*

*And though the sunset, with her warm red flesh,
And blown hair tangled in a golden mesh,
Wind all along the west her mute caress,
Yet turn and let our hearts commune afresh.*

*Yes! go not till the amorous night suspires
From heaven her stars, from earth her glow-worm fires,
And I will sing my songs to you, and press
Your shoulder with my head till day expires.*



ALLEGRO.

SUNRISE BY THE SEA.

RED blossom of a fruit-tree, and the sweet
Long leaves and slim of arching branches meet
Above this pleasant bower of shadowy grass,
This trysting-place of love where we entreat
Time to go by us and hoar Death to pass.

Between the green boughs rises on the sky
The pale blue sea, a wonder to the eye,
And spreading softly on its utter rim
The rich dawn-crimsons flush and pale and die,
And fade into the morning cold and dim.

This is the only place we have for love ;
The nightingale, the wood-thrush and the dove
May hide from the destroyer ; we alone
To desert earth and barren sky above
In vain for rest and safety make our moan.

Sunrise by the Sea.

Yet this one leafy nook is left for us,
Whose flowery walls are not yet ruinous ;
 Here we may hide us till the night be done,
And fly away unwounded,—even thus,—
 While scarce we linger for the tell-tale sun.

Stay, love ! the perfect sunrise is not yet ;
Sparkles of gold and rose-colour are set
 Along the waters and the shimmering sky,
But still the woodland avenues are wet,
 And all our night of passion not gone by.

We will not go till over the white sea
The first rim of the gold sun peeringly
 Laugh out into the air, and fiery feet
Leap over the wan waterfloods that he
 May climb into the world and find it sweet.

In one last cup of amber-coloured wine
Pledge me our sacred passion, thine and mine,
 Then drain the chalice into this wild rose,
For Love may know the fair oblation thine
 If he should pass our lair to-day, who knows ?

This scented vintage Love himself has pressed,
And this aroma with his breath caressed ;
The smell of all flowers dedicate to him
In this divinest cordial is compressed,
And wild wood-flavours lurk about the brim.

How like white birds the small sails far below
Veer out into the imminent sharp snow
Of flooding dawn ! like butterflies afloat,
They skim upon the waters to and fro,
A quivering life in every happy boat.

And dark upon the verge of that bright well
That floods out light, a splendid miracle,
Behold one little pinnace very far,
And whither it is going, who can tell,
And who the pilot is, and what the star !

Ah dearest ! for the star of our desire
Is red and heart-shaped with a core of fire,
And evermore cloud-shadows of the night
Pursue it up the heavens ever higher,
And all the name we give it is Delight.

Sunrise by the Sea.

Ah darling ! for our hollow lives are led
By one round whose ineffable crowned head
The lights of heaven flash and are not dim ;
By such a spirit are we piloted,
And Love in Passion is the name of him.

O that some frail boat from the sounding shore
Might carry us, to come again no more,
To sail far out into the burnished east,
Till in some island never seen before
The terror of our hunted lives had ceased.

Shall we to-day be wise, and to win rest
Tear heart from heart and panting breast from breast,
Shall I to this way, you to that way go,
And each with some new common love be blessed,
And quite forget ?—ah ! kiss me and say, No !

Now till the stars are bright again, farewell !
And let your own heart's beating, like a bell,
At night-fall bring you back among the flowers
With some new thing and passionate to tell
Of dreamy longings thro' the weary hours !

And if they find and slay us, love, what then?
We shall no more be numbered among men,
But in the choir of Love's victorious
Our name and praise shall pass the fame of ten,
And Love himself be glorified in us !

THE ALMOND TREE.

PURE soul, who in God's high-walled Paradise
Dost walk in all the whiteness of new birth,
And hear'st the angels' shrill antiphonies,
Which are to heaven what time is to the earth,
Give ear to one to whom in days of old
Thou gavest tears for sorrow, smiles for mirth,
And all the passion one poor heart could hold !

Behold, O Love ! to-day how hushed and still
My heart is, and my lips and hands are calm ;
When last I strove to win you to my will,
The angels drowned my pleading in a psalm ;
But now, sweet heart, there is no fear of this,
For I am quiet ; therefore let the balm
Of thy light breath be on me in a kiss !

Alas ! I dream again ! All this is o'er !
. . . See, I look down into our garden-close,
From your old casement-sill where once you wore
The ivy for a garland on your brows ;

There is no amaranth, no pomegranate here,
But can your heart forget the Christmas-rose,
The' crocuses and snowdrops once so dear?

But these, like our old love, are all gone by,
And now the violets round the apple-roots
Glimmer, and jonquils in the deep grass lie,
And fruit-trees thicken into pale green shoots ;
Thy garth, that put on mourning for thy death,
Is comforted, and to the sound of lutes
Dances with Spring, a minstrel of bright breath.

But I am not yet comforted, O Love !
Does not the auriole blind thy gentle eyes ?
That crimson robe of thine the virgins wove
Trammels thy footsteps with its draperies,
Else thou would'st see, would'st come to me, if even
The Cherubim withstood with trumpet-cries,
And barred with steel the jewelled gates of heaven !

In vain, in vain ! Lo ! on this first spring-morn,
For all my words, my heart is nearer rest,
And though my life, through loss of thee, is worn
To saddest memory by a brief dream blest,
I would not mar one moment of thy bliss

To clasp again thy bright and heaving breast,
Or fade into the fragrance of thy kiss.

Yet would an hour on earth with me be pain ?
A greater boon than this of old was won
By her, who through the fair Sicilian plain
Sought her lost daughter, the delicious one,
With tears and rending of the flowery hair,
And sang so deftly underneath the sun,
That Hell was well-nigh vanquished by her prayer.

Hail, golden ray of God's most blessed light !
Hail, sunbeam, breaking from the faint March sky !
What rosy vision melts upon my sight ?
What glory opens where the flashes die ?
Surely she comes to me on earth, and stands
Among the flowerless lingering trees that sigh
Around her, and she stretches forth her hands.

Her hands she stretcheth forth, but speaketh not,
And all the bloom and effluence round her rise
That crown her heavenly saintship with no spot,
Herself the fairest flower in Paradise ;
Draw near and speak to me, O Love, in grace,
And let me drink the beauty of thine eyes,
And learn of God by gazing in thy face.

Tempt not my passion with such lingering feet,
My trembling throat and strained white lips are numb;
Through black, twined boughs I see thy body, sweet!
Robed in rose-white, thou standest calm and dumb!
O heart of my desire, no more delay,
Yet nearer in thy cloudy glory come,
Yet nearer, or in glory fade away!

Fade then, sweet vision! fail, O perfect dream!
There is no need of words of human speech,
And the blind extacy of thought I deem
A loftier joy than mortal sense can reach;
No more, ye flowers of Spring, shall my dull song
Be heavy in your ears, but, each to each,
My love and I hold converse and be strong.

The mystic splendour pines away, and leaves
Its fainter shadow in the almond-tree,
Whose cloud of bloom-white blossom earliest cleaves
The waste wan void of earth's sterility;
Before the troop of lyric Dryades
Veiled, blushing as a bride, it comes, and see!
Spring leaps to kiss it, glowing in the breeze.

While life shall bring with each revolving year
Its winter-woes and icy mystery,

This fair remembrance of the sun shall bring
My thoughts of Love re-risen in memory ;
Old hopes shall blossom with the west wind's breath
And for Her sake the almond-bloom shall be
The white fringe on the velvet pall of death.

FORTUNATE LOVE.

IN SONNETS AND RONDELS.



I.

FIRST SIGHT.

WHEN first we met the nether world was white
And on the steel-blue ice before her bower
I skated in the sunrise for an hour,
Till all the grey horizon, gulphed in light,
Was red against the bare boughs black as night ;
Then suddenly her sweet face like a flower,
Enclosed in sables from the frost's dim power,
Shone at her casement, and flushed burning bright

When first we met !

My skating being done, I loitered home,
And sought that day to lose her face again ;
But Love was weaving in his golden loom
My story up with hers, and all in vain
I strove to loose the threads he spun amain
When first we met.

II.

ELATION.

LIKE to some dreaming and unworldly child
Who sits at sunset in the mist of hope,
When all the windows of the west lie ope,
Flooding the air with splendour undefiled,
And sees, by fancy in a trance beguiled,
An angel mount the perilous burning slope,
Winning the opal and the sapphire cope,
And laughs for very joy and yearning wild ;—
So I, in whose awakening spirit Love
Rules uninvited, not to be controlled,
Am happiest when I struggle not, but hold
My windows open and my heart above,
Watching, with soul not bowed nor over-bold,
The august air with which his footsteps move.

III.

IN CHURCH-TIME.

I TOOK my flute among the primroses
That lined the hill along the brown church-wall,
For she was there ; till shades began to fall,
I piped my songs out like a bird at ease,
When suddenly the distant litanies
Ceased, and she came, and passed beyond recall,
And left me throbbing, heart and lips and all,
And vanished in the vistaed cypress-trees ;
Ah ! sweet, that motion of harmonious limbs
Drove all my folly hence, but left me faint !
Oh ! be not, my desire, so wholly saint,
That I must woo thee to the rhythm of hymns !
Ah ! me, my dizzy brain dissolves and swims !
And all my body thrills with keen constraint !

IV.

DEJECTION AND DELAY.

CANST thou not wait for Love one flying hour,
O heart of little faith ? are fields not green
Because their rolling bounty is not seen ?
Will beauty not return with the new flower ?
Because the tir'd sun seeks the deep sea-bower
Where sleep and Tethys tenderly convene,
And night and starless slumber intervene,
Shall sunlight no more thrill the world with power ?
True Love is patient ever ; by the brooks
He hath his winter-dreams, a fluent choir,
And waits for summer to revive again ;
He knows that by-and-by the woodland-nooks
Will overflow with blossoming green fire,
And swooping swallows herald the warm rain.

v.

EXPECTATION.

WHEN flower-time comes and all the woods are gay,
When linnets chirrup and the soft winds blow,
Adown the winding river I will row,
And watch the merry maidens tossing hay,
And troops of children shouting in their play,
And with my thin oars flout the fallen snow
Of heavy hawthorn-blossom as I go,
And shall I see my love at fall of day
 When flower-time comes ?
Ah, yes ! for by the border of the stream
She binds red roses to a trim alcove,
And I shall fade into her summer-dream
Of musing upon love,—nay, even seem
To be myself the very god of love,
 When flower-time comes !

VI.

IN THE GRASS.

OH ! flame of grass, shot upward from the earth,
Keen with a thousand quivering sunlit fires,
Green with the sap of satisfied desires
And sweet fulfilment of your sad pale birth,
Behold ! I clasp you as a lover might,
Roll on you, bathing in the noon-day sun,
And, if it might be, I would fain be one
With all your odour, mystery and light,
Oh flame of grass !

For here, to chasten my untimely gloom,
My lady took my hand, and spoke my name ;
The sun was on her gold hair like a flame ;
The bright wind smote her forehead like perfume ;
The daisies darkened at her feet ; she came,
As Spring comes, scattering incense on your bloom,
Oh flame of grass !

VII.

RESERVATION.

HER terrace looking down upon the lake
Has corners where the deepest shadows are,
And there we sit to watch the evening-star,
And try what melody our lutes can make ;
Our reticent hearts with longing almost break,
The while her violet eyes strain out afar,
As though her soul would seek the utmost bar
Where faltering sunset quivers, flake by flake ;
My forehead rests against the balustrade ;
My cheeks flush hot and cold ; my eager eyes
Are fixed on hers until the moon shall rise,—
The splendid moon of Love,—and unafraid
The utmost debt of passionate hope be paid,
And all be given that now her heart denies.

VIII.

BY THE WELL.

HOT hands that yearn to touch her flower-like face,
With fingers spread, I set you like a weir
To stem this ice-cold stream in its career,—
And chill your pulses there a little space ;
Brown hands, what right have you to claim the grace
To touch her head so infinitely dear ?
Learn courteously to wait and to revere,
Lest haply ye be found in sorry case,
Hot hands that yearn !
But if ye bring her flowers at my behest,
And hold her crystal water from the well,
And bend a bough for shade when she will rest,
And if she find you fain and teachable,
That flower-like face, perchance, ah ! who can tell ?
In your embrace may some sweet day be pressed,
Hot hands that yearn !

IX.

MAY-DAY.

THE Past is like a funeral gone by,
The Future comes like an unwelcome guest,
And some men gaze behind them to find rest
And some urge forward with a stifled sigh ;
But soft perennial flowers break forth and die,
And sweet birds pair and twine a woodland nest ;
They, sifting all things, find the Present best,
And garnish life with that philosophy.
Like birds, like flowers, oh ! let us live To-day,
And leave To-morrow to the Fates' old fingers,
And waste no weeping over Yesterday !
Lo ! round about the golden lustre lingers,
The fresh green boughs are full of choral singers,
And all the Dryades keep holiday.

X.

MISTRUST.

THE peacock screamed and strutted in the court,
The fountain flashed its crystal to the sun,
The noisy life of noon was just begun,
And happy men forgot that life was short ;
We two stood, laughing, at the turret-pane,
When some Apollo of the ranks of Mars,
Crimson with plumes and glittering like the stars,
Galloped across below, and there drew rein.
To see so confident a man-at-arms
My heart sank suddenly from sun to shade,
But she, who knows the least of Love's alarms,
Laid one soft hand upon my throbbing wrist,
And in her eyes I read the choice she made,
And anger slumbered like a tired child kissed.

XI.

EAVESDROPPING.

WHILE May was merry in the leafy trees
I found my fair one sitting all alone,
Where round our well the long light ferns had grown
So high, so deep, that she was drowned in these,
And her bright face and yellow buoyant hair
Scarce peered above them, where she sat and read,
Flecked by the leaf-lights wavering overhead,
A great black-letter book of verses rare ;
Wherein our Chaucer, years and years ago,
Wove the sad tale of Cryseyde untrue,
And Troylus yearning with a broken heart ;
At last she, sighing, shut the rhythmic woe,
And let her sweet eyes dream against the blue,
And swore she would love truly, for her part.

XII.

A GARDEN-PIECE.

AMONG the flowers of summer-time she stood,
And underneath the films and blossoms shone
Her face, like some pomegranate strangely grown
To ripe magnificence in solitude ;
The wanton winds, deft whisperers, had strewed
Her shoulders with her shining hair outblown,
And dyed her breast with many a changing tone
Of silvery green, and all the hues that brood
Among the flowers ;
She raised her arm up for her dove to know
That he might preen him on her lovely head ;
Then I, unseen, and rising on tip-toe,
Bowed over the rose-barrier, and lo !
Touched not her arm, but kissed her lips instead,
Among the flowers !

XIII.

CONFIDENT LOVE.

Now all day long we wander hand in hand,
And taste of love in many wondrous ways ;
And still my fingers tremble with amaze
To find they rest in hers at her command ;
We sit together in the sweet corn-land,
Her light head quivering on my sun-burnt throat,
The while the gold threads of her loose hair float
Along my shoulder by the light wind fanned ;
And thus for many days we lightly played
Shepherd and shepherdess with mimic crook,
And sunned and shaded in the elm-tree's nook,
Until the newness of our love decayed
And then we rose and left the heights and strayed
Along the glen and down beside the brook.

XIV.

LOVERS' QUARREL.

BESIDE the stream and in the alder-shade,
Love sat with us one dreamy afternoon,
When nightingales and roses made up June,
And saw the red light and the amber fade
Under the canopy the willows made,
And watched the rising of the hollow moon,
And listened to the water's gentle tune,
And was as silent as she was, sweet maid,
Beside the stream ;
Till with " Farewell ! " he vanished from our sight,
And in the moonlight down the glade afar
His light wings glimmered like a falling star ;
Then ah ! she took the left path, I the right,
And now no more we sit by noon or night
Beside the stream !

XV.

RECONCILIATION.

BUT walking on the moors at dawn one day,
When all the sky was flushed with rosy hue,
I saw her white robe dabbled in the dew,
Among the sparkling heather where she lay ;
Sobbing, she turned from me, and murmured "Nay!"
Then rising from the ground, she strove anew
To turn away, but could not stir, and flew
At last into my arms the old sweet way ;
And Love, that watched us ever from afar,
Came fluttering to our side, and cried "O ye,
Who think to fly, ye cannot fly from me ;
Lo ! I am with you always where you are !"
Yet henceforth are we twain and are not three,
Though Love is on our foreheads like a star.

XVI.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

BENEATH her window in the cool, calm night,
I stood and made as though I would have sung,
Being full of life and confident and young,
And dreaming only of my love's delight ;
Then suddenly I saw the glooms divide,
And gliding from the darkest cypress-tree
Death came, white-boned, and snatcht my lute from
me,
And sat himself, grimacing, by my side.
Just then, as when the golden moon looks down
On starless waters from a stony sky,
My love's fair face shone out above on high ;
Whereat I, fearing nothing of Death's frown,
Turned smiling to salute her lovely head,
And when I turned again, lo ! Death had fled !

XVII.

EXPERIENCE.

DEEP in the woods we walked at break of day,
And just beyond a whispering avenue,
Where all the flowers were nodding, full of dew,
We heard a sound of speaking far away ;
And turning saw a pale calm queen assay
To tell that Love was cruel and untrue,
To knots of girls in white and cream and blue,
Who round her feet, while listening, lounged and lay,
Deep in the woods.
But we two crushed the moss with silent feet,
And passed aside unseen ; for what to us,
Who knew Love's breath, and fanned its passionate heat,
And laughed to hear our hearts' twin pulses beat,
Were tuneless songs of maidens murmuring thus,
Deep in the woods ?

XVIII.

THE EXCHANGE.

LAST night, while I was sitting by her side,
And listening to her boddice' silken stir,
And stroking her soft sleeves of yellow fur,
I gave the sweet who is to be my bride
A little silver vinaigrette, star-eyed,
And chased with cupids ; and received from her
The gold-embossed pomander-box of myrrh
She pounced her white hands with at eventide.
My sleep till dawn was all consumed with thirst,
And passionate longing ; then the great sun's light
Burst through my flimsy dreams, and nothing tells
Of all the joy that gladdened me last night,
Except this little golden box that smells
As her sweet hands did when I kissed them first.

XIX.

UNDER THE APPLE-TREE.

AGAINST her breast I set my head, and lay
Beneath the summer fruitage of a tree,
Whose boughs last spring had borne for her and me
The fleeting blossom of a doubtful day ;
That rose and white had tasted swift decay,
And now the swelling fruits of certainty
Hung there like pale green lamps, and fair to see,
And I was strong to dream the hours away
Against her breast ;
Her satins rustled underneath my head,
Stirred by the motions of her perfect heart,
But she was silent, till at last she said,—
While all her countenance flushed rosy-red,—
“ Dear love ! oh ! stay forever where thou art,
Against my breast ! ”

XX.

EPITHALAMIUM

HIGH in the organ-loft, with liliated hair,
Love plied the pedals with his snowy foot,
Pouring forth music like the scent of fruit,
And stirring all the incense-laden air ;
We knelt before the altar's gold rail, where
The priest stood robed, with chalice and palm-shoot,
With music-men, who bore citole and lute,
Behind us, and the attendant virgins fair ;
And so our red aurora flashed to gold,
Our dawn to sudden sun, and all the while
The high-voiced children trebled clear and cold,
The censer-boys went swinging down the aisle,
And far above, with fingers strong and sure,
Love closed our lives' triumphant overture.

FLOWER OF THE MARIGOLD.



FAINT amorist, make haste to go
And take your humble violets hence,
Or else my Lady's eyes will show
They move not her magnificence ;
The man must bring a bolder flower
Who fain would be her paramour.

She stands up stately, like a palm
That breathes the warmth of tropic air ;
Her looks are fixed in such a calm
As vast Egyptian statues wear ;
The very motion of her hands
Is redolent of antique lands.

And I have found the flower she loves,
Whose burning leaves shut in the sun ;
All day to watch his path it moves,
And dreams of him when day is done,
And when my passionate tale I told,
I wooed her with a marigold !

SUNSHINE BEFORE SUNRISE.



THE ice-white mountains clustered all around us,
But arctic summer blossomed at our feet ;
The perfume of the creeping shallows found us,
The cranberry-flowers were sweet.

The reindeer champed the moss, and high and over
The sparkling peak that crowned the dim ravine
The sky was violet-blue ; and loved by lover
We clung, and lay half-seen.

Below us through the valley crept a river,
Cleft round an island where the Lap-men lay ;
Its sluggish water dragged with slow endeavour
The mountain-snows away.

One thin blue curl of wood-smoke rose up single,—
The only sign of life the valley gave ;
But where the fern-roots and the streamlets mingle
Our hearts were warm and brave.

My arm was round her small head sweetly fashioned,
Her bright head shapely as a hyacinth-bell ;
So silent were we that our hearts' impassioned
Twin throb was audible.

Alas ! for neither knew the language spoken
Amongst the people whence the other came ;
A few brief words were all we had for token,
And just each other's name.

" My love is pure as this blue heaven above you ! "
I said,—but saw she let the meaning slip ;
" Jeg elsker Dem," I felt must be, *" I love you ! "*
And answered, lip to lip.

Oh ! how the tender throbbing of her bosom
Beat, bird-like, crushed to mine in that embrace,
While blushes, like the light through some red blossom,
Dyed all her dewy face.

There is no night-time in the northern summer,
But golden shimmer fills the hours of sleep,
And sunset fades not, till the bright new-comer,
Red sunrise, smites the deep.

But when the blue snow-shadows grew intenser
Across the peaks against the golden sky,
And on the hills the knots of deer grew denser,
And raised their tender cry,

And wandered downward to the Lap-men's dwelling,
We knew our long sweet day was nearly spent,
And slowly, with our hearts within us swelling,
Our homeward steps we bent.

Down rugged paths and torrents mad with foaming,
With clinging hands, we loitered, blind with joy,
I thought a long life spent like this in roaming
Would never tire or cloy.

And very late we saw before us, dreaming,
The red-roofed town where all her days had been,
And far beyond, half shaded and half gleaming,
The blue sea, flecked with green.

Ah ! sweet is life and sweet is youth's young passion,
And sweet the first kiss on a girl's warm cheek ;
Since then we both have learnt in broken fashion
Each other's tongues to speak ;

And many days and nights of love and pleasure
Have laid their fragrant chaplets on our hair,
And many hours of eloquent wise leisure
Have made our lives seem fair ;

But Memory knows not where so white a place is
In all her shining catalogue of hours,
As that one day of silent warm embraces
Among the cranberry-flowers.

LYING IN THE GRASS.

BETWEEN two golden tufts of summer grass,
I see the world through hot air as through glass,
And by my face sweet lights and colours pass.

Before me, dark against the fading sky,
I watch three mowers mowing, as I lie :
With brawny arms they sweep in harmony.

Brown English faces by the sun burnt red,
Rich glowing colour on bare throat and head,
My heart would leap to watch them, were I dead !

And in my strong young living as I lie,
I seem to move with them in harmony,—
A fourth is mowing, and that fourth am I.

The music of the scythes that glide and leap,
The young men whistling as their great arms sweep,
And all the perfume and sweet sense of sleep,

The weary butterflies that droop their wings,
The dreamy nightingale that hardly sings,
And all the lassitude of happy things,

Is mingling with the warm and pulsing blood
That gushes through my veins a languid flood,
And feeds my spirit as the sap a bud.

Behind the mowers, on the amber air,
A dark-green beech wood rises, still and fair,
A white path winding up it like a stair.

And see that girl, with pitcher on her head,
And clean white apron on her gown of red,—
Her even-song of love is but half-said :

She waits the youngest mower. Now he goes ;
Her cheeks are redder than a wild blush-rose :
They climb up where the deepest shadows close.

But though they pass, and vanish, I am there.
I watch his rough hands meet beneath her hair,
Their broken speech sounds sweet to me like prayer.

Ah ! now the rosy children come to play,
And romp and struggle with the new-mown hay ;
Their clear high voices sound from far away.

They know so little why the world is sad,
They dig themselves warm graves and yet are glad ;
Their muffled screams and laughter make me mad !

I long to go and play among them there ;
Unseen, like wind, to take them by the hair,
And gently make their rosy cheeks more fair.

The happy children ! full of frank surprise,
And sudden whims and innocent extacies ;
What godhead sparkles from their liquid eyes !

No wonder round those urns of mingled clays
That Tuscan potters fashioned in old days,
And coloured like the torrid earth ablaze,

We find the little gods and loves portrayed,
Through ancient forests wandering undismayed,
And fluting hymns of pleasure unafraid.

They knew, as I do now, what keen delight,
A strong man feels to watch the tender flight
Of little children playing in his sight ;

What pure sweet pleasure, and what sacred love,
Comes drifting down upon us from above,
In watching how their limbs and features move.

I do not hunger for a well-stored mind,
I only wish to live my life, and find
My heart in unison with all mankind.

My life is like the single dewy star
That trembles on the horizon's primrose-bar,—
A microcosm where all things living are.

And if, among the noiseless grasses, Death
Should come behind and take away my breath,
I should not rise as one who sorroweth ;

For I should pass, but all the world would be
Full of desire and young delight and glee,
And why should men be sad through loss of me?

The light is flying; in the silver-blue
The young moon shines from her bright window through:
The mowers are all gone, and I go too.

PARADISE.

HER eyes are a twin columbine,
Her lips more red than cherry-knots,
Her polished cheek a nectarine,
Her hair the hue of apricots ;
Her every feature mocks a flower,
Or shames the ripeness of ripe fruit,
And in her mind, from hour to hour,
Aroma'd fancies bud and shoot.

She seems, in this sweet solitude.
My Eve and Eden both in one,
And I an Adam, red and rude,
Too coarse for her to wait upon ;
But every day I love her more,
And hope in Heaven to grasp the whole,
To rise to heights unguessed before
And through her body learn her soul.

ELSINORE.

I SAT on the walls of Kronborg ;
And below me, along the beach,
The soldiers were strolling and lounging,
And spreading their linen to bleach.

Their pipe-lights streamed in the sea-wind,
And now and again I heard,
Laughed out under yellow moustaches,
The ring of a Danish word.

While above them an English poet,
Not half so merry or strong,
Was mingling their mirth with the sunlight,
And weaving them into a song.

For the sea was a tremulous opal,
The sky more purple than blue,
And across the Sound to Sweden
The white gulls flashed and flew.

My heart was one with the pleasure
That laughed out around me then,—
The joy of the sea sun-smitten,
And the life of the strong brown men.

And I rose in a great exultation,
While the citadel gloomed at my feet,
And along the jut of the bastions
The north and the south sea beat.

The curve of the pearl-white shingle
Ran northward to Marienlyst,
And I thought of the pale Ophelia's
Sad mouth strained to be kissed.

And I knew that from where I was standing,
In old days long gone by,
Hamlet had heard at midnight
The ominous spectre cry.

Then all my spirit was shaken,
And the old verse-music rose
To my lips, with its cadenced wisdom,
And full sonorous close.

And the art of Shakspeare was added
To the great glad splendour there,
Fulfilling the physical beauty
And glory of light and air.

Till my heart was flushed with the passion
Of love like the perfume of wine,
And the mouth of an unseen Nereid
Was pressed in a kiss to mine.

Blown up by the winds from the waters,
She rose in a delicate mist,
And my lips still burn with the ardour
Of the mystical kiss she kissed.

IN THE BAY.

FAR out to east one streak of golden light
Shows where the lines of sea and heaven unite,—
 White heaven shot through with film of flying cloud,
Grey sea the wind just flutters and makes bright,
 And wakes to music neither low nor loud.

Two horns jut out, and join, and rim the bay,
Save where a snow-white strip of shingle may
 Break through the bar, where, black as black can be,
Their steep and hollow rocks resound all day
 The jarred susurrus of the tumbling sea.

Here on a sunny shelf, while hot the air
Flooded our limbs and faces, brown and bare,
 We lounged and shouted, plashing with slow feet
The warm and tidal pools that wasted there,
 And down below us saw the sea-foam beat.

Then, leaping down together with a cry,
I watched them dash into the waves, and fly
 Around the shallows as a sea-bird bends,
Tossing the froth and streaming, and then I
 Plunged like Arion to my dolphin-friends.

The cool impassive water clung and pressed
Around our buoyant bodies, head and breast ;
 Downward I sank through green and liquid gloom,
By all the streams of shoreward seas caressed,
 Dark vitreous depths by faint cross-lights illumed.

And rising once again to sunlit air
We flung the salt-drip back from beard and hair,
 And shouted to the sun, and knew no more
The trodden earth, with all its pain and care,
 But set our faces sea-ward from the shore.

Then, lo ! the narrow streak of eastern light
Along the dark sea's line, began to smite
 Its radiance up the heaven; the flying mist
Sped from the sky, and left it gold and white,
 And made the tossing sea like amethyst.

Midway between the rocks that girt the bay,
An islet rose, of rock as black as they ;
 Sombre it stood against the glowing sky
And two of us swam out to it straightway,
 And cleft the waves with strenuous arm and thigh.

And as I strove and wrestled in the race,
I turned and saw my comrade's merry face ;
 The sunlight fell upon his hair, and through
The film of water showed the sinewy grace
 Of white limbs, bright against the sea's green-blue.

So, laughingly, we won the rock, and then
Climbed up and waited for our fellow-men ;
 Sat on the eastward brink of it, and let
The cold foam cling upon our feet again,
 And splash our limbs with tangle crushed and wet.

There, holding back the wet hair from my eyes,
The moment seized me with its strange surprise ;
 Straightway I lost all sense of present things,
And, in the spirit, as an eagle flies,
 I floated to the sunrise on wide wings.

Some antique frenzy sliding through my brain
Made natural thought a moon upon the wane,
Fast fading in a vague and silvery sky ;—
I know not if such moments be not gain ;
They teach us surely what it is to die

But suddenly my comrade spoke ; the sound
Recalled my soul again to common ground ;
And now, like sea-gods on a holiday,
My friends were tumbling in the foam around,
And made the waters hoary with their play.

With that, I spread my naked arms, and drew
My hands together o'er my head, and knew
That all was changing into cool repose,
And while into the pulsing deep I flew
My glad heart sang its greeting ; ah ! who knows

What power the sea may have to understand,
Since all night long it whispers to the land,
And moans along the shallows, and cries out
Where skerries in the lonely channels stand,
And sounds in drowning ears a mighty shout ?

“Sea that I love, with arms extended wide,
I clasp you as the bridegroom clasps the bride ;
 Strong sea, receive me throbbing ; close me round
With tender firm embracings ! Not denied,
 I plunge and revel in thy cool profound !

“There are who fear thee ; what have I to fear ?
Lover, whose frowns and very wrath are dear !
 Shake out the odours of the windy waves,
Sound thy dim music that my ears may hear ;
 I shall not tremble though thy channels rave !

“Have I not known thee ? Lo ! thy breath was mild
About my body when I was a child ;
 My hair was blanched with sea-winds full of brine ;
No voice beguiled me as thy voice beguiled ;
 The loveliest face my childhood knew was thine !

“Then on the shore in shadow ; but to-day
I plunge far out into the sun-lit spray ;
 A child’s heart gave thee all a child’s heart can,
But now I love thee in a bolder way,
 And take the fiercer pastime of a man.

“Nor I alone enjoy thee ! Here a score,
Comrades of mine and still a million more
Might leap to thee ; thou would'st rejoice again,
Like her of old whose mystic body bore
As many breasts as there are mouths of men !

“Clinging, thy cool spray makes us thine alone ;
We have no human passion of our own ;
Here all is thine, prone body and dumb soul ;
Thine for thy waves to dash, thy foam to crown,
Thy circling eddies to caress and roll !”

With that I shot along the glittering sea,
Parting the foam, and plunging full of glee,
Tossed back my tangled hair, and struck far out
Where orient sunrise paved a path for me,
And whispering waves returned my lyric shout.

Behind me and around me, lithe and fair,
Like Triton-kings at sport my comrades were,—
Some tossing conchs that they had dived to find,
Some spreading ruddy limbs and sunshot hair
To woo the soft cool kisses of the wind.

It seemed the sea had heard my hymn of praise,
And laughed beneath the torrid sky ablaze ;
 The pure green water lapped us, warm and red ;
The sweet life throbbed in us in wondrous ways ;
 We let the sunlight stream on hands and head.

Ah ! for the sky put off its robe of gold ;
A sharp wind blew out of a cloudy fold ;
 The bitter sea but mocked us ! To the core
The keen breeze pierced us with a cutting cold,
 And sad and numb we huddled to the shore.

So pass life's ecstasies, and yet, ah me !
What sorrow if no change should ever be,
 Since, out of grieving at a present blight,
Come sweeter wafts of garnered memory,
 And sweeter yearning for a new delight.

And but for that chill end in rain and wind,
I know not if my changing brain would find
 On its palimpsest memories of that day,
When full of life and youth and careless mind
 We dashed and shouted in the sunlit bay.

FROM THE NORWEGIAN OF IBSEN.



I.

ILLE.

AGNES, my exquisite butterfly,
I will catch you sporting and winging ;
I am weaving a net with meshes small,
And the meshes are my singing.

HÆC.

If I am a butterfly, tender and small,
From the heather-bells do not snatch me ;
But since you are a boy, and are fond of a game,
You may hunt, though you must not catch me !

ILLE.

Agnes, my exquisite butterfly,
The meshes are all spun ready ;
It will help you nothing to flutter and flap :
You are caught in the net already.

HÆC.

That I am a butterfly, bright and young,
A swinging butterfly, say you?
Then, ah ! if you catch me under your net,
Don't crush my wings, I pray you.

ILLE.

No ! I will daintily lift you up,
And shut you into my breast ;
There you may shelter the whole of your life,
Or play as you love best.

II.

IN the sunny orchard-closes,
While the warblers sing and swing,
Care not whether blustering Autumn
Break the promises of Spring ;
Rose and white the apple-blossom
Hides you from the sultry sky ;
Let it flutter, blown and scattered,
On the meadows by-and-by.

Will you ask about the fruitage
In the season of the flowers ?
Will you murmur, will you question,
Count the run of weary hours ?
Will you let the scarecrow clapping
Drown all happy sounds and words ?
Brothers, there is better music
In the singing of the birds !

From your heavy-laden garden
Will you hunt the mellow thrush ?

He will pay you for protection
With his crown-song's liquid rush !
O ! but you will win the bargain,
Though your fruit be spare and late,
For remember, Time is flying,
And will shut your garden-gate.

With my living, with my singing,
I will tear the hedges down !
Sweep the grass and heap the blossom,
Let it shrivel, pale and brown !
Swing the wicket ! Sheep and cattle,
Let them graze among the best !
I broke off the flowers ; what matter
Who may revel with the rest !

LÜBECK.

WE sat in Lübeck underneath
The lindens of the minster-close ;
Round us the city, still as death,
Was gathered like a rose.

The great red tower sprang over us,
Far up a dome of sapphire glow
More vast and clear and luminous
Than English summers know.

Faint flutings of the fluctuant breeze
Sang from the orchards out of sight,
And whispered through the linden-trees,
And stirred the shadowy light.

And, whistling low, a gooseherd came,
And led his flock across the grass ;
And then we saw a burgher dame,
Demurely smiling, pass.

We sucked the juice from tangled skeins
Of currants, rosy-red and white,
And in the wind the ancient vanes
Were creaking out of sight.

And little maidens, too, came by,
And shook their tails of flaxen hair ;
We held a conclave, small and shy,
To taste our juicy fare.

Then, wandering down by mouldering towers,
We reached at last a little knoll ;
And there, among the pansy-flowers,
We read of "Atta Troll."

How sweetly in the falling light
The broad still river, like a moat,
Swung, with its water-lilies white,
And yellow buds afloat !

A little matter ! but such moods
Make up the sum of happy hours ;
In uncongenial solitudes
They come to us like flowers.

So lay that afternoon to sleep
Among your dearest pansy-knots,—
The hushed herbarium where you keep
Your heart's forget-me-nots,

Remembering how the day went by
At Lübeck, by the minster-towers,
Enshrined in all the mystery
Of mediæval hours.

July, 1872.

MOORLAND.



Now the buttercups of May
Twinkle fainter day by day,
And the stalks of flowering clover
Make the June fields red all over,—

Now the cuckoo, like a bell,
Modulates a sad farewell,
And the nightingale, perceiving
Love's warm tokens, ends her grieving,—

Now the coyest lovers find
Hollows suited to their mind,
Where, in sultry twilight weather,
Lips and hair may melt together,—

Let us twain arise and go
Where the freshening breezes blow,
Where the granite giant moulders
In his circling cairn of boulders !

Just a year ago to-day,
Friend, we climbed the self-same way,
Through the village-green, and higher
Past the smithy's thundering fire.

Up and up and where the hill
Wound us by the cider-still ;
Where the scythers from the meadow
Sat along the hedge for shadow ;

Where the little wayside-inn
Signals that the moors begin,
Ah ! remember all our laughter,
Loitering at the bar,—and after !

All must be the same to-day,
All must look the same old way,
Only that the sweet child-maiden
We admired so well, fruit-laden,

Now, like an expanded bud,
Must be blown to womanhood,
And the fuller lips and bosom
Must proclaim the perfect blossom.

One step more ! Before us, lo !
Sheer the great ravine below,
Empty, save where one brown plover
Wheels across the ferny cover !

Here, where all the valley lies
Like a scroll before our eyes,
Let us spend our golden leisure
In a world of lazy pleasure.

Comrade, let your heart forget
All the thoughts that fray and fret ;
Till the sun-down flares out yonder,
Stretch here in the fern, and ponder.

Only just to touch your hair
Is as much as I can bear,
Or with clinging languid fingers
Half to press your hand that lingers.

See, below us, where the stream
Winds with broken silver gleam,
How the nervous quivering sallows
Bend and dare not touch the shallows !

In that willow-shaded pool,
When last June the airs were cool,
 How we made the hot noon shiver
 With our plunge into the river.

In the sweet sun, side by side,
You and I and none beside !
 Head and hands, thrown backward, slacken,
 Sunk into the soft warm bracken.

Up in heaven a milky sky
Floats across us leisurely ;
 When we close our eyes, the duller
 Half-light seems a faint red colour.

In this weary life of ours
Pass too many leaden hours ;
 In our chronicles of passion
 Too much apes the world's dull fashion.

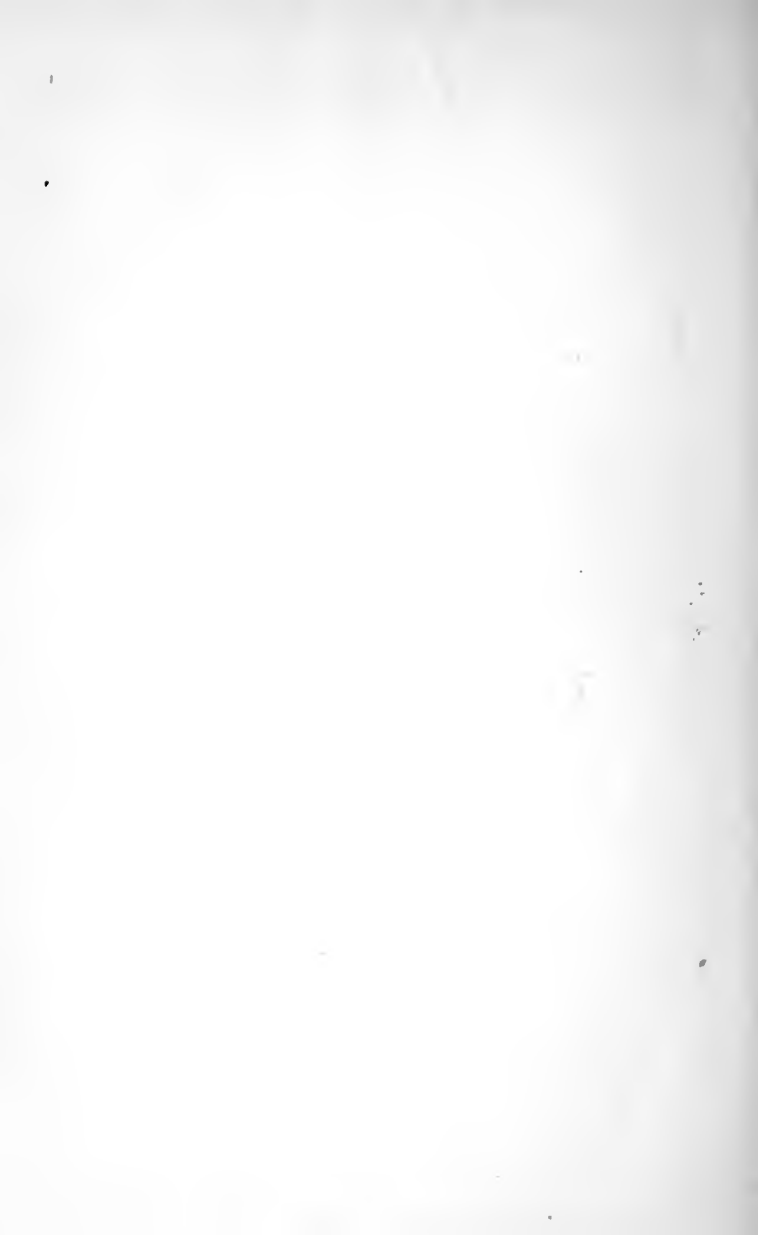
If our spirits strive to be
Pure and high in their degree,
 Let us learn the soaring pæan
 Under God's own empyrean.

Leisure in the sun and air
Makes the spirit strong and fair ;
 Flaccid veins and pallid features
 Are not fit for sky-born creatures.

Come then, for the hours of May
Wane and falter, day by day,
 And the thrushes' first June chorus
 Will have waked the woods before us !



ANDANTE.



*O WIND of Provence, subtle wind that blows
Through coverts of the impenetrable rose,
O musical soft wind, come near to me,
Come down into these hollows by the sea,
O wind of Provence, heavy with the rose !*

*How once along the blue sea's battlements
Thy amorous rose-trees poured their spicy scents !
The heavy perfume streamed down granite walls,
Where now the prickly cactus gibes and crawls
Down towards cold waves from grim rock-battlements.*

*Of all the attar, sharp and resinous,
The spines and stalks alone are left for us,
And so much sickly essence as may cleave
About the hands of maidens when they weave
Wild roses into wreaths of bloom for us.*

*Where are the old days vanished, ah ! who knows ?
When all the wide world blossomed with the rose,
When all the world was full of frank desire,
When love was passion and when flowers were fire,
Where are the old days vanished, ah ! who knows ?*

*Come down, O wind of Provence, sing again
In my lulled ears, for quenching of all pain,
The litany of endless amorous hours,
The song of songs that blossomed with the flowers,
And brightened when the flowers decayed again.*

*When Ermengarde, the lady of Narbonne,
Star-like, above the silken tourney shone,
With powdered gold upon her ruddy hair ;
There was no woman anywhere so fair
As Ermengarde, the glory of Narbonne !*

*Love's ladies paced the sward beneath all towers,
Their grass-green satins stirred the daisy-flowers ;
No knight or dame was pale with spent desire,
For pleasure served them as an altar-fire ;
Their mortal spirits faded like soft flowers.*

*Some wreaths and robes, a lute with mouldered strings,
One clear perennial song on deathless wings,
Still tell us later men of those delights
That spent their happy days and passionate nights,
When Life smote gaily on his tense harp-strings.*

*Now cold earth covers all of them with death;
The gray world travels on with failing breath,
Long having passed her prime, and twilight comes,
And some men wait for dream-millenniums,
But most are gathering up their robes for death.*

*The old air hangs about us cold and strange;
We stand like blind men, wistful for a change,
But only darkness lies on either hand,
And in a sinister, unlovely land,
We cling together, waiting for the change.*

*But in this little interval of rest
May one not press the rose-flower to his breast,
The sanguine rose whose passionate delight
In amorous days of old was infinite,
And now, like some narcotic, sings of rest?*

*So be it ! I, the child of this last age,
To whom the shadow of death is heritage,
Will set my face to dream against the past ;
This time of tears and trouble cannot last,
The dawn must some time herald a new age.*

*Till then, O wind of Provence, thrill my brain
With musk and terebinth and dewy rain
From over-luscious roses, and declare
That wine is delicate and women fair ;
O wind of Provence, shall I call in vain ?*

ENCOMIUM MORTIS.

OUR toil and trouble done,
Before a breeze we run
Into the setting sun,
 Over a pearly sea ;
The ring of misty light
Round us is infinite ;
Beyond our utmost sight
 What mysteries may be ?

No birds' wings, fluttering o'er
The waves from shore to shore,
Disturb the sheeny floor
 That spreads from day to night ;
We, gazing each to each,
See silent lips beseech,
See eyes that strain to reach
 The future out of sight .

And like a wind that shakes
The breast of silver lakes,
The only sound that breaks
 The silence of the hour,
Comes from the oaken lip
Where waters stream and slip
Around our gliding ship,
 Like green leaves round a flower.

But downwards, still and slow,
We see the red sun go
Where Tethys waits below ;
 And now, along the deep,
He slants, a scarlet ball,
While deeper shadows fall,
And over us the pall
 Of twilight falls, like sleep.

Silence is absolute,
Till one of us, long mute,
Touches a slender flute
 With lips and fingers wan ;
Over the silver stops
His pale hand clings and drops,
As through the bulrush-tops,
 Falters a dying swan.

And so, while waves are whist,
We bear an altar, kissed
By stars of amethyst,
 And rimmed with violet stone ;
And while the flutist plays
Songs of forgotten days,
This glimmering gem we raise,
 Hard by the helm alone.

Then from a scented store,
Piled up long years before
On some dim Indian shore,
 Where all the winds are spice,
A priest with languid limbs
Pours over all the rims
Rich oil, and dust that swims,
 And grains of golden rice.

Then while we gaze on him,
And all the west grows dim,
A wild and wailing hymn
 Goes up to night from us ;
The while with fan and fire
He lights the odorous pyre,
Till all the gums aspire
 In grey smoke luminous.

Then joining hand to hand,
A worn-out weary band,
Around the flame we stand,
And sing, with failing breath,
The last sweet song we can,
While faint and pale and wan,
We render, man by man,
Our hearts away to Death.

*Oh gentle Death ! no more
We fly from shore to shore,
The hopes that filled our hearts before
Are faded, past and gone ;
To-morrow and to-day
Are merged in yesterday ;
Our souls are fain to fly away
Where no sun ever shone.*

*Like weary men and weak,
Who find not what they seek,
And shrink because the world is bleak
And bites them to the core,
And only ask to lie
Where no rough winds pass by,
To live their lives out there, and die,
And never wander more.*

*So our proud hearts are come
To stand before thee dumb ;
We ask no rich millenium,
But only rest and sleep ;
The time and scope of men
Is threescore years and ten ;
The flower of passion wastes, and then
A bitter grain they reap.*

*But thou, oh ! steep our eyes,—
Now wild with memories,—
In poppy draughts where slumber lies,
And no harsh wakings are ;
Here on the polished sea
Our place of sleep should be !
How sweet to fade away to thee
Beneath so still a star !*

*The sky like some great flower
That feels the earth's dim power,
And closes inward hour by hour,
Grows nearer while we speak !
Lo ! surely, sea and sky
Will mingle by-and-by,
In league to crush out utterly
Our wasted lives and weak !*

Encomium Mortis.

*Our very eyes grow dim !
O Death, the bubbles swim
Along the sea, and float and skim
The hollows of our ship ;
Each bubble bears the breath
Of some man fallen to death,
And lo ! no brother sorroweth,
As out of life they slip.*

*We falter and forget !
Our sun of life has set ;
Why should we strain around us yet
This threadbare robe of breath ?
Our voices one by one
Fail in the hymn begun ;
Our last sad song of life is done,
Our first sweet song of Death !*

REVOLT.

WHEN Gabriel, with his viol at his knee,
Is marshalling the singing saints in choir,
Whose robes are samite though their wings are fire,
And all their faces calm as calm can be,
There you may see, while heaven adoring sings,
One beautiful, hungry face that longs for love,
With whom on earth desire and sorrow strove,
Whose soul yet hankers after earthly things ;
So I, who walk between the gilded shrines
Of virtue, singing loudly like the rest,
Remember, somewhere in my inmost breast,
How sweet it is at night, when no moon shines,
Outside, among the cloves and columbines,
To feel one's hands and lips caressed and pressed.

INITIUM AMORIS.



I.

WITH sun-kissed face, and body flaming red,
Down through his luscious Eden Adam went,
And while his foot crushed out a cloud of scent,
He sighed aloud, and to himself he said :
“ O summer garden with soft fruitage fed,
Hast thou no solace for my tired intent ?
Here in my heart unknown desires are pent
That find no respite in your blossom-bed ! ”
With that the curled hair set about his mouth
Moved, and his warm face, burning, flushed anew ;
Above his head his bare brown arms he threw,
And, moaning with the urgent inward drouth,
Paced wearily the sultry garden through,
And sank beneath a cedar in the south.

II.

THERE in the evening while he slept, God came
And breathed a dream into his closèd eyes ;
Adown a long decline of opal skies
He looked through vistaëd woodlands of no name,
Then out of one small silver bough like flame
Two bell-shaped fruits rose ripe, pomegranate-wise,
While all the glade was ringing with sweet sighs,
And slumber made unquiet passion tame.
He woke, a sharp pain clinging to his side,
When night was drifting through the slim palm-wands,
But through the dusk of those divine dim lands
A rose-warm flush came flooding far and wide,
And cool and fresh within his burning hands
He felt the fruit worth all the world beside.

OLD AND NEW.



I.

B.C.

COME, Hesper, and ye Gods of mighty waters,
Ye nymphs and Dryades,
Come, all the choir of white Pierian daughters,
And girls of lakes and seas,
Evoë ! and evoë Io ! crying,
Fill all the earth and air ;
Evoë ! and the hanging woods, replying,
Shall shout the echo there !

All day in breathless swoon or heavy slumber,
We lay among the flowers,
But now the stars break forth in countless number
To watch the dewy hours ;
And now Iacchus, beautiful and glowing,
Adown the hill-side comes,
With tabrets shaken high, and trumpets blowing,
And resonance of drums.

The leopard-skin is round his smooth white shoulders,
The vine-branch round his hair ;
The eyes that rouse delight in maid-beholders,
Are glittering, glowworm-fair ;
The king of all the provinces of pleasure,
Lord of a wide domain,
He comes and brings delight that knows no measure,
A full Saturnian reign.

O take me, Mænads, to your foxskin-chorus,
Pink-lipped like volute-shells,
For I must follow where your chant sonorous
Roars down the forest-dells ;
The sacred frenzy rends my throat and bosom,
I shout, and whirl where He,
Our vine-god, tosses like some pale blood-blossom,
Borne on a windy sea.

Around the car, with streaming hair and frantic,
The Mænads and wild gods,
And shaggy fauns and wood-girls corybantic
Toss high the ivy-rods ;
Brown limbs with white limbs hotly intertwining
Whirl in a maddening dance,
Till, when at last Orion is declining,
We slip into a trance.

The satyr's heart is faintly, faintly beating ;
The white-lipped nymph is mute ;
Iacchus up the western slope is fleeting,
Uncheered by horn or lute ;
Hushed, hushed are all the shouting and the singing,
The rapture, the delight,
For out into the cold grey air upspringing,
The morning-star shines bright.

II.

A.D.

NOT with a choir of angels without number,
And noise of lutes and lyres,
But gently, with the woven veil of slumber
Across thine awful fires,
We long to see thy face serene and tender,
Smile on us, fair and sweet,
Where round the print of thorns, in thornlike splendour,
Transcendent glories meet !

We have no hopes if thou art near beside us,
And no profane despairs,
For all we need is thy great hand to guide us,
And lightly take our cares ;
For us is no to-day, to-night, to-morrow,
No past time nor to be,
We have no joy but thee, than sin no sorrow,
No life to live but thee !

The cross, like pilgrim-warriors, we follow,
Led by the eastern star ;
The wild crane knows us, and the wandering swallow,
Fled southward to Shinar ;
All night the single star is bright above us,
We go with weary feet ;
For in the end we know are they who love us,
And their embrace is sweet.

Most sweet of all, when dark the way and moonless,
To feel a touch, a breath,
And know our fainting spirits are not tuneless,
Our unseen goal not Death ;
To know that Thou, in all the old sweet fashion,
Art near us to sustain !
We thank Thee, Lord, by all Thy tears and passion,
By all Thy cross and pain !

Along the shore whose nightly waves are broken
With mighty wings of wind,
We walk in fear ; no word of us is spoken,
Our eyes with foam are blind ;
The flying mist between our lips is bitter,
The deeps are full of sound,
But far away the stedfast star-beams glitter,
And still a path is found.

And when the night, with all its pain, is over,
 Across the hills of spice
Thyself will meet us, glowing like a lover,
 Before Love's Paradise ;
There are the saints, with palms, and songs, and roses,
 And better still than all,
The long, long day of love that never closes,
 Thy marriage festival !

A FAREWELL.

I MAY not see your face again !

 This ivied porch, these quivering trees
Must murmur year by year in vain
 For me, ungladdened of all these,
 Tossed on the thankless seas.

But often while the vast of air
 Is smitten through with violent light,
Between the winds and waters there
 My inner vision shall have sight
 Of that most calm delight.

And as a man, whose nights and days
 Are spent in fierce and changeful love,
May chance to see in wondrous ways
 His mother bend from Heaven above,
 With pure eyes like a dove.

So I, who woo the perilous deep,
And frantic waves that interlace,
Shall have my hours of rest and sleep
To dream of your leaf-shaded face,
And all its quiet grace.

PERFUME.

WHAT gift for passionate lovers shall we find?
Not flowers nor books of verse suffice for me,
But splinters of the odorous cedar-tree,
And tufts of pine-buds, oozy in the wind;
Give me young shoots of aromatic rind,
Or samphire, redolent of sand and sea,
For all such fragrances I deem to be
Fit with my sharp desires to be combined.
My heart is like a poet, whose one room,
Scented with Latakia faint and fine,
Dried rose leaves, and spilt attar, and old wine,
From curtained windows gathers its warm gloom
Round all but one sweet picture, where incline
His thoughts and fancies mingled with perfume.

THE RENAISSANCE.

“ O Venus, quene of lovës cure,
Thou life, thou lust, thou mannës hele,
Beholde my cause and my quarele,
And yef me some part of thy grace ! ”

GOWER.

BETWEEN the gray land and the purple sea,
Mother of flowers, my heart takes hold on thee,
Rise up, O mother, like some sea-green blossom,
Or like a daffodil appear to me !

Our sad life's apple has a sterile seed ;
For thy old reign our weary spirits bleed ;
Return, O queen, and clasp us to thy bosom,
There to find summer and warm flowers indeed.

Men called thee Venus, rising from the sea,
And in the vales thou wert Persephone,
Everywhere Lady of the wealth of roses,
And fulness of the world's fertility.

A colder deity is now enshrined
Deep in our narrow garden-plots confined,
 Virgin protectress of our sylvan closes,
With vervain round her broad white brows entwined.

And though we worship her till evensong,
Nor think the ritual wearisome or long,
 When sunset in the western ether blazes,
To thee, O queen, our wayward hearts belong !

But no man through the cities far and wide,
By reedy rill, or any dim lake's side,
 To thee soft hymns, to thee an altar raises,—
By the dead only wert thou defied.

No mountains ring with tabrets or with lyres,
No Thyads dance about the sacred fires,
 No snake-crowned girls, with lion-coloured tresses,
Heap cones and ivy-buds to feed the pyres.

And now no more by ancient forest-bounds
The swain is roused at dead of night by sounds
 Of thundering feet that range the wildernesses;
Bacchus, or Hecat with her shadowy hounds.

We flutter through our little fleeting day,
Beneath a windy heaven coped with gray,
Just look around, and weep awhile, and shiver,
Then like the flower of grasses fade away.

What wonder, ah ! if haply now and then
We cold and comfortless benighted men
Desire thy glory, Venus, to deliver
Our spirits into ruddy life again.

On summer-nights and when the yellow corn
Home to its quiet garner-grave is borne,
Then, and then only, when our hearts are bursting
To shed the consciousness of life forlorn,—

Then, and only, do we yearn for thee,
Bright as the sun, unfettered as the sea,
Then our weak spirits are consumed by thirsting
For the wild recklessness that once might be.

Once, and no more ; for thou art fallen, O queen !
The nations mock thee for a thing obscene !
One like the snow and purer than the lily
Regent and peerless on thy throne is seen !

The day of sins that wrought no aftertaste,
For all our wild endeavour, is gone past ;

Thou art not fair, poor queen, thy breath is chilly !
Return to that dim shadow where thou wast

SONG.

I HAVE risen from rest on a sleepless bed
For my sense was still full of your wonderful hair,
And a sorrowful doubt had crept into my head
That it might not be fair ;
So come out to me now while the moon is on high,
Like a sickle of fire on a blue-green sky,
For the blossoms are full on the tulipan-tree,
And are waiting for thee !

Am I fool or grown mad to be waiting you here ?
For the river descending that flows underground
Bears your ghost like the shade of a leaf that is sere,
Coiling you round and round ;
And the dark deal planks and the dusty air
Have taken the sunlight all out of your hair,
And that is the reason I could not find sleep ;
Let me weep, let me weep !

GUENEVERE.

WHEN the autumn nights were hot,
 (Peach and apple and apricot,)
Under the shade of a twining rose,
Deep in the high-walled garden-close,
Guenevere, red as a sunset glows,
 Plighted her love to Lancelot.

Overhead, at a window, unseen,
 (Apple and filbert and nectarine,)
Gawaine lounged in the hot gold air,
Fingered a lute, and at last aware
Of an eager face and the Queen's bright hair,
 Laughed a little in bitter spleen.

One long kiss of the lips like wine,
 (Filbert and cherry and juice of pine,)
Then with a light and delicate foot,
Pressing the red leaves fallen and mute,

She hurried away from the love-salute,
With a flush in her cheek for a sign.

Woe to the fair soul, blighted and sick,
(*Nightshade, wormwood and agaric,*)
Woe for the glory of pure delights,
The days of prowess, the stainless nights,
Woe, for the canker blackens and bites,
Woe, for the heart is stung to the quick !

ON A LUTE FOUND IN A SARCO- PHAGUS.

WHAT curled and scented sun-girls, almond-eyed,
With lotos-blossoms in their hands and hair,
Have made their swarthy lovers call them fair,
With these spent strings, when brutes were deified,
And Memnon in the sunrise sprang and cried,
And love-winds smote Bubastis, and the bare
Black breasts of carven Pasht received the prayer
Of suppliants bearing gifts from far and wide !
This lute has out-sung Egypt ; all the lives
Of violent passion, and the vast calm art
That lasts in granite only, all lie dead ;
This little bird of song alone survives,
As fresh as when its fluting smote the heart
Last time the brown slave wore it garlanded.

THE PARADISE OF A WEARIED SOUL.



“ Man sagt ; wer eine Nacht geruht,
Umarmt von blühenden Jasmine,
Dem hab' im Traum die Stirn geküss
Die Todesgöttin Proserpine.

“ Ach, stirbe solchen Tod dein Freund,
Hätt er gelebt sein schönstes Leben—
Mein blasser, duftiger Jasmin,
Du kannst mir Tod und Leben geben !”

DER NEUE TANHÄUSER.

SOMETIMES across my garish life
There falls a faint phantasmal veil,
That slowly stills the whirling strife
As with a dropping frosty hail ;
And underneath a mystic moon
My earthly senses fade and swoon,
And through a world of subtle things
I journey, lapped in utter calm,
And all my restlessness finds wings
And all my sorrow balm.

There walk the languorous multitudes
Who sought and found eternal rest ;

They wander through the silent woods
By twilight and old sleep caressed,
And every dark-eyed traveller sups
The honey from the briony-cups,
And with a long white finger strikes
The gelid dew from jasmine-bowers,
Or shatters all the orange spikes
Of agrimony-flowers.

And there I too in bliss may walk,
With slumbrous heavy-lidded eyes,
And round my brows a tender stalk
Of vervain twisted garland-wise ;
And in my fingers ye may see
Three leaves of flowerless lunary,
And round me bygone memories
Gather and crowd, and laugh or weep ;
I have no portion in all these,
No pleasure, but in sleep.

For in that valley, dim and green,
I brood upon my own pure mind,
That fruitless blossom epicene
That communes not with its own kind ;
And all are so, and never word
From all those multitudes is heard,

The Paradise of a Wearied Soul. 107

But from their passions once set free
They rest, and to perfection brought,
Are drowned in an eternity
Of slow delicious thought.

Pain comes not there, nor keen delight,
And no man knows satiety ;
The same dim lustre, day and night,
Floods all the valley dreamily ;
Summers and winters wax and wane
For these most fortunate, in vain,
Since all the year is changeless there,
And ever as the slow months pass,
They see the same leaves wave in air,
The same flowers in the grass.

And underneath the pale blue sky,
Along the hillsides, hoary-gray,
Funereal trains and palls go by,
Of souls that die from day to day ;
And when they reach the valley's head,
The noiseless armies of the dead
Come forth to meet them face to face,
And lead them singly, hand in hand,
And show to each his separate place
In that enchanted land.

The ardours of a woman's face,
And sudden thrillings of love-pain
Have in this vale no dwelling-place,
And throbbing hearts grow calm again ;
For men and women quite forget
How once they fluttered in Love's net,
And all whom once extreme desire
Wore to an ember of a soul,
For moonshine change the fierce sun-fire
In this sleep-haunted goal.

Here love-consoled, walks Diomed,
And Tristran with his ladies twain,
And here Francesca's stately head
Is shriven from its ghostly pain ;
The large grey eyes of Guenevere
Gaze into Arthur's with no fear,
And Juliet sees, without a sigh,
Across the moon-fern pastures go
The champion of Love's chivalry,
Her passionate Romeo.

There no bizzare desires distress,
No soft contours of limbs or lips ;
The slow blood flushes with no stress
Across the brain's constrained eclipse ;

The Paradise of a Wearied Soul. 109

Along the stream the manifold
Nárcissi-stars of white and gold
Gaze down into the depths ; their eyes
 Feel all the passion souls can know
In that calm life without surprise
 The dead enjoy below.

Here lying in the faint gray grass,
 Or walking by the water's breast,
The spirits of all dead men pass
 A long eternity of rest ;
For here their passions find repose
In weary life's delicious close,
And while they pace the lotos-beds
 No living breathing form intrudes,
Save dark narcotic blossom-heads
 Of flowers in multitudes.

I, only I, have life and breath,
 I, only I, in slumber bound,
Walk through the resonant land of death,
 An alien on that hallowed ground ;
Those happy shades will never know
The sad return of passionate woe,
My heart is like a fountain sealed,
 A dark lake frosted up and white,

110 *The Paradise of a Wearied Soul.*

A poor soul fluttering unannealed,
Ready to take its flight.

But, for a season, calm and glad,
I walk among the dead of old,
And with the wise, serenely sad,
Long dialogues I seem to hold;
And down the shadowy colonnades
I wander with illustrious shades,
And in my ears their souls rehearse,
In measured accents, soft and slow,
The noblest thoughts, in prose and verse,
That Rome or Greece could know.

But, oh ! the calm, the sweet repose,
My weary spirit finds in sleep !
The cataracts foam their windy snows,
And moan their music down the steep ;
Along the vale the marsh-flowers bloom,
And steep the air in faint perfume,
And scent and low harmonious noise
Drift slumber through my weary brain,
The while I learn the silent joys
Of quietude from pain.

The Paradise of a Wearied Soul. 111

Till, woe! I feel through all my bliss
All suddenly the piercing fangs
Of life returning with a kiss
That stings my brow with poison-fangs ;
And through my veins the surging blood
Throbs on and rushes in a flood,
And borne upon the wildering ocean
Of old omnipotent desires,
Tossed by the anguish of emotion,
My dream of peace expires.

And through the thundering world again,
Like some red leaf a tempest drives,
Smitten by horror, thrilled with pain,
My tossing spirit whirls and strives !
Satanic passions stab me through,
And what I would not, that I do,
And ever in my aching ears
The monstrous satyr-riot swells,
While, over all, my spirit hears
The clangour of sad bells.

An end must come at last, at last !
When in the tender arms of death,
My stormy life of weakness past,
I may restore this borrowed breath ;

112 *The Paradise of a Wearied Soul.*

And in the valley of my dream,
May taste that dear Lethean stream,
Whose thought, through toilsome hours and days,
 Has brought me solace not in vain,
And wandering in its grassy ways
 Stir never thence again !

SONNETS FROM THE ITALIAN OF
FRANCESCO REDÌ.

I.

PROEM.

ALL ye who fain would in Love's service be,
Read these my amorous follies, and the whole
Incurable desire of my faint soul,
And then if ye be taken, blame not me !
Behold, I write to the end that ye may see
That when by winding paths ye win Love's goal,
A dark and sterile garden is the dole
For all your faithful heart's intensity ;
And if a passing blossom there be sweet,
Or if a stray and luscious fruit ye meet,
'Tis but the flower of fraud and fruit of pain,
Laid for a snare in which you wring your feet,
And if you conquer these, to Love's defeat,
'Torment and shame and death is all your gain.

11.

THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY LOVE.

OH ! ye who follow Virtue, go not there !

Those meadows are the flowery ways of Love,
And he who there as Lord and King doth move
Is ever on the watch to trap and snare

The incautious hearts of all the young and fair,
And if those sunny perilous ways ye prove,
Your soul will flutter like a caged dove ;

Oh ! pause and taste not that perfum'd air !

Those shy white-breasted girls who smile and stand
With flower-bound hair, and singing, hand in hand,
Along the roses, will lay wait for you,
And clip your wings, and never let you through,
But shut your soul up in a thirsty land,
And Love will come with them and mock you too.

III.

CAPTIVITY.

As I was gazing at her, well-a-day!
The iron-crown'd King of Love came by,
And, ere a path of egress I could spy,
His archers shot me, and half-dead I lay;
Then, while I swooned, they bore me thence away,
And shut me in a cage to weep and sigh,
And in this dolorous dungeon I must lie,
Racked daily by Love's jailors for their play;
Nor can I ever dream to wander free,
Or lose the pangs wherewith I am oppress,
Or know the sweet repose of painless rest,
For, if I rightly read the King's decree,
Deep in the care of Love's own iron breast
The keys are hidden till Death shall seize on me.

IV.

HEAVENLY LOVE.

IN primal chaos and the dark profound,
I worshipped in my own sepulchral mind
The impure Love, whose image ye may find
Encased in these my verses' rhythmic sound ;
By devious ways and groping underground
I traced the slippery paths that shelve and wind,
Till, suddenly, sweet essences combined,
And Love, the pure and infinite, I found.
Then all my heart expanded to the light,
And grew and panted with the sweet desire
Of heavenly beauty and divine sun-fire,
Of which Love only is the source and site,
Who gave me, lest my mortal eyes should tire
His mirror, thee, my glorious Lady bright !

v.

THE CREATION OF MY LADY.

THAT Love,—whose power and sovereignty we own,
And who before all time was did beget
The sun and moon and splendid stars, and set
All lovely things to speak of Him alone,—
Late looking earthward from his supreme throne
Saw that,—although the beauty lingered yet,—
The froward heart of man did quite forget
That all this beauty from His presence shone ;
Wherefore, desiring to reclaim his eyes
To heaven by some unequalled new delight,
He gave the world a treasure from the skies,
My Lady's sacred beauty, pure and bright,
Whose body is a robe of woven light,
And fashioned in the looms of Paradise.

VI.

GRIEF.

SWEET Ladies, who to Love your hearts incline,
And hand in hand walk down compassion's way,
Pause here an hour and weep with me and say
If ever there was sorrow like to mine !
My Lady had a heart that was the shrine
Of every splendid truth that scorns decay,
And round about her glorious limbs did play
Transcendent bloom, and from her eyes did shine
Such lights as flash about the aurioled head
Of some divine fair angel in God's choir,
And all her soul was like an altar-fire
With faith and love, and round her life was shed
The silent chrism of innocent desire
And godlike grace ! Sweet Ladies, she is dead !

VII.

THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES.

THE golden spheres are God's sublime citole,
Whereon His spirit like a plectrum flies,
But those seraphic organ-harmonies
Are silent to the hearing of man's soul ;
Their deep symphonic rapture cannot roll
Across the ear of cold mortalities ;
But Love attracts the languid heart to rise
Out of itself, and win the heavenly goal ;
Nor tempts in vain, but frees and wakes, and kindles
A sweet desire to reach that song's abode,
Clearly to hear what sounds uncertain still,
Nor does Love cease to woo the heart, until
The clamour of the riotous senses dwindles
And all the soul yearns upward unto God !

VIII.

LOVE THE MUSICIAN.

LOVE is the Minstrel ; for in God's own sight,
The master of all melody, he stands,
And holds a golden rebeck in his hands,
And leads the chorus of the saints in light ;
But ever and anon those chambers bright
Detain him not, for down to these low lands
He flies, and spreads his musical commands,
And teaches men some fresh divine delight.
For with his bow he strikes a single chord
Across a soul, and wakes in it desire
To grow more pure and lovely, and aspire
To that ethereal country where, outpoured
From myriad stars that stand before the Lord,
Love's harmonies are like a flame of fire.

IX.

THE END OF EARTHLY LOVE.

LOVE, thou hast had thy will with me ! oh ! say,

What is there left for me to give thee more ?

Love, thou hast had thy will with me to-day,

I can but give thee what thou had'st before !

Oh ! hungry Love, shall I devote my tears

To quench this never-tiring old desire ?

Behold ! the sum of all my joys and fears

Lies hidden behind thy quivering wings of fire !

What wilt thou more ? Oh ! wilt thou that I die ?

Behold my breast before thee strained and bare !

Stab me to death, or wind my coils of hair

Around my throat and slay me where I lie ;

Crush me or kill me, tyrannous god and fair,

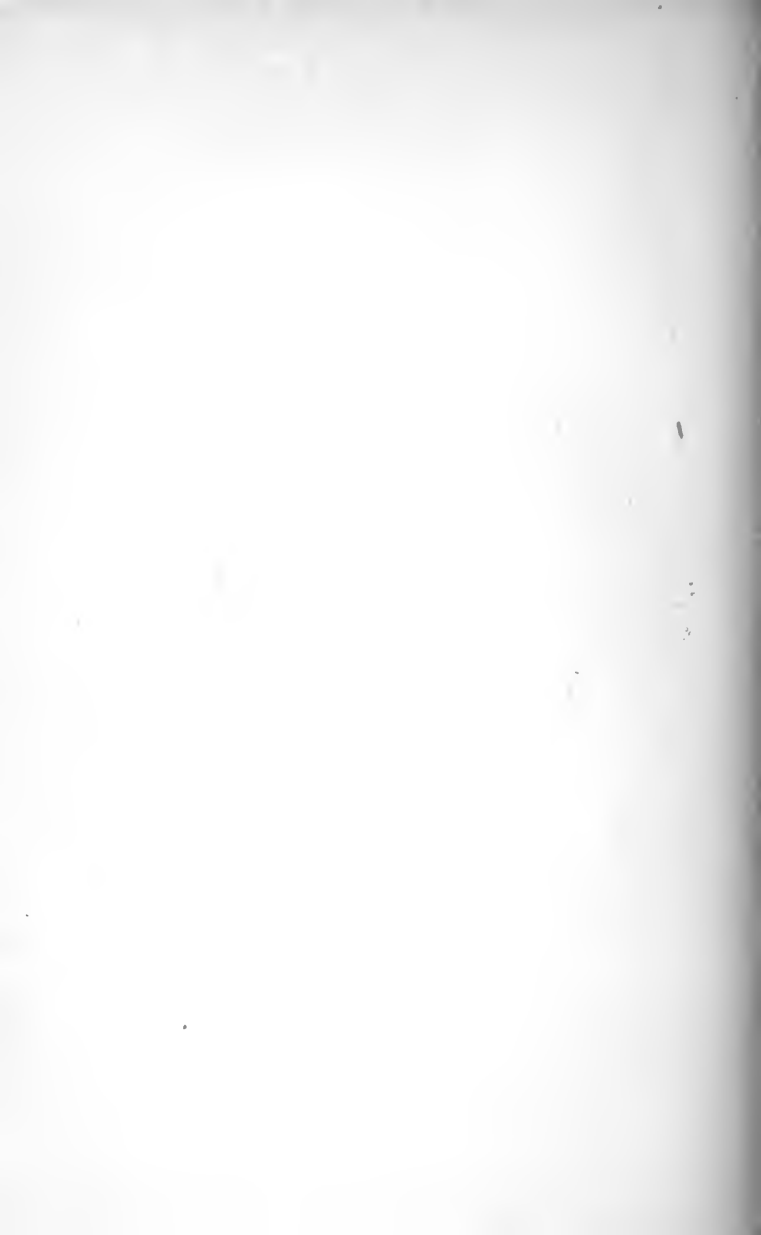
But with thy kisses stifle my last cry !

x.

REPENTANCE.

THIS is the solemn day and this the hour,
When thou, O Lord, wast nailed upon the tree ;
Eloi, eloi lama sabachani !
Thou criedst, and the demons lost their power ;
Behold ! before thy sacred face I cower,
Not worthy to be looked upon by Thee,
But oh ! do Thou be merciful to me,
And give me chastity for heavenly dower.
Oh ! God, thou knowest how often, for my part,
I cried "*Repentance*" from the fleshly fires !
Thou who all pure and all unspotted art,
Forgive me now, for now my soul aspires !
Help me to fight against my wild desires,
And with Thy wounds close up my bleeding heart !

ADAGIO.



*THE saint of old who saw the witch-fire shine
High on the island-peak of Ormandine,
Nearer and nearer to the perilous shore
Drew, and forgot the heavenly call divine.*

*There, round the desolate rock, in that wild air,
He paced the shingle, mad with vain despair,
And heard the wizard's laughter more and more,
Resounding from the topmost granite lair.*

*Nor ever would have seen the sun again,
But spent an immortality in vain,
Had not the champion of the Sanguine Cross
Sailed to his rescue and the monster slain.*

*So has it been with these my earlier days,
Bewitched with splendour of the sun's last rays,
Caught with the cloud-wings of the albatross,
Snared with the green light and the lurid blaze.*

*The strained fantastic hues of sunset light
Have filled my full horizon of delight,
I have not known the power of perfect day,
And shivered at the range of perfect night.*

*The clear white colour when the dawn began
Seemed poorer than the twilight blanced and wan,
The opaline green spaces far away
More sweet than waters where the sunbeams ran.*

*But now the gradual lapse of western light
Proclaims the calm that just precedes the night ;
A little while the spaces round the sea
Will glimmer to the distance out of sight.*

*And then the purple clouds that turn to dun
Will gather round the grave-gates of the sun,
Blackness and silence on the waves will be,
And day have ended and the night begun.*

*But see the twilight star that starts and shines
Where all the soft light narrows to thin lines ;
Its pure intensity of liquid flame
Can teach me more than its own soul divines.*

*A fragment of the silver dawn, it lies
Bright on the bosom of the fading skies,
And through the sunless hours will still proclaim
A promise of a morrow to faint eyes.*

*What say you? Shall we watch the star leap higher,
And pierce the darkness with its filmy fire,
Or turn away before the blind bee's wings
Fold up for sleep, and all the gleams expire?*

*You do not stir? You will not rise and go?
Then listen longer, if it must be so;
Some songs of sober thought are yet to sing,
Some pulses of my heart are yet to show!*

THE APOTHEOSIS OF ST. DOROTHY.

A MAIDEN wandering from the east,
A saint immaculately white,
I saw in holy dream last night,
Who rode upon a milk-white beast ;
Across the woods her shadow fell,
And wrought a strange and silent spell,
A miracle.

With firm-set eyes, and changeless face,
She passed the cities, one by one ;
Her hair was coloured like the sun,
And shed a glory round the place
Where'er she came, she was so fair
That men fell down and worshipped there
In silent prayer.

And ever in her sacred hands
She bore a quaintly carved pyx
Of serpentine and sardonyx,
The wonder of those eastern lands ;
Wherein were laid preserved in myrrh,
The gifts of vase and thurifer
She bore with her.

And after many days she came
To that high mountain, where are built
The towers of Sarras, carved and gilt
And fashioned like thin spires of flame :
Then like a traveller coming home,
She let her mild-eyed palfrey roam,
And upward clomb.

Oh ! then methought the turrets rang
With shouting joyous multitudes,
And through the tumult, interludes
Of choral hosts, that played and sang ;
Such welcome, since the world hath been,
To singer, prophetess or queen,
Was never seen.

The golden gates were opened wide ;
The city seemed a lake of light,
For chrysopras and chrysolite
Were wrought for walls on every side ;
Without the town was meet for war,
But inwardly each bolt and bar
Shone like a star.

Then, while I wondered, all the sky
Above the city broke in light,
And opened to my startled sight
The heavens immeasurably high,
A glorious effluence of air,
And shining ether, pure and rare,
Divinely fair.

And, rising up amid the spires,
I saw the saintly maiden go,
In splendour like new-fallen snow,
That robs the sun-rise of its fires ;
So pure, so beautiful she was,
And rose like vapoury clouds that pass
From dewy grass.

Between her hands, the pyx of gold
She held up like an offering sent
To Him, who holds the firmament
And made the starry world of old ;
It glimmered like the golden star
That shines on Christmas eve afar,
Where shepherds are.

And clouds of angels, choir on choir,
Bowed out of heaven to welcome her,
And poured upon her nard and myrrh,
And bathed her forehead in white fire,
And waved in air their gracious wings,
And smote their kindling viol-strings
In choral rings.

But she, like one who swoons and sees
A vision just before he dies,
With quivering lips and lustrous eyes
Gazed up the shining distances ;
But soon the angels led her on
Where fiercer cloudy splendour shone,
And she was gone.

And then a voice cried :—" This is she
Who through great tribulation trod
A thorny pathway up to God,
The blessed virgin Dorothy.
Still to the blessed Three-in-One
Be glory, honour, worship done
Beneath the sun !"

HOLY THURSDAY.



ON Holy Thursday, I, being all forlorn,
 Stood with the river winding at my feet,
 And, where the swirling currents foam and beat,
I marked a little float of blossoms borne,
Bruised palm-leaves, and white lilies frayed and torn,
 A broken chaplet of blanched roses sweet ;
 Then wandering up the stream, I went to meet
These gifts along the margin of the corn ;
My way led on by headlands trimly shaved,
 And shelving banks of vetch and rosemary,
Till I was stayed, and where a runnel laved
 A little marish-plot, I turned—to see
A vision of Christ Himself, who, priestlike, waved
 His wounded hands, and rose and came to me.

SPILLÉNDE GENIER.

A BAS-RELIEF OF THORWALUSEN'S.*

I.

SEE, there is silence now ! The harmony,
Drawn out into a long delicious close,
Falls gently, as the petals of a rose
Drop silently at night into the sea ;
The moon that climbs behind the poplar-tree,
And therein like a ghostly blossom glows,
Has waited patiently until she knows
That rest is brooding round the god-like three.
Ah ! little trinity of light and song,
What earth, what heaven can claim you ? O delay !
Still let your curv'd fingers wind along
The trembling strings that quiver while you play !
Let not my earthly presence do you wrong !
I move not, speak not, lest you fade away !

* Three winged children playing on musical instruments.

II.

But ah ! one sweet child, turning, waves his wings,
And lifts his magian harp into the air ;
Can those be tears that glimmer in his hair,
Fast fallen from his eyes' pure water-springs ?
His fingers falter soft athwart the strings ;
The melody is more than heart can bear,
It ravel's all the threads of pain and care,
And, to dissolve the rhythmic bond, he sings.
It seems as though a bird, too sad to mourn,
When all its happier mates are fled and flown,
Should sing old spring-songs to a winter grove !
Eldest and saddest of the three, forlorn
Of dreams and fancies, he has slowly grown
The soul and image of the antique Love.

III.

But, see, his brother, laughing, folds his plumes,
And strikes a chord upon his viol-wires ;
No anthem this of faded hearts' desires,
Or life's wan ghost, that walks among the tombs ;
And he who holds the golden pipe resumes
His mellow music, and a song aspires
From both in unison as when the choirs
Of Venus' maidens sing above their looms.

For these are Hope, that pipes our lives away,
And Pleasure, with his plectrum, sweet desire ;
Love stands apart, and sadder far than they,
For he has tasted deeper life and higher,
And seen the eyes of Pleasure lose their fire,
And Hope, delayed past hoping for, decay.

COPENHAGEN, *June*, 1872.

ILLICET.

WHEN first the rose-light creeps into my room,
And stirs the liquid gloom,
 My heart awakes, and sighs with its old pain,
 Its ringing pulses jar with their old strain,
 And Love, my lord and bane,
Renews that wild desire that is my doom.

To free myself from him, I rise and go,
Down terrace-paths below,
 Whence watered gardens lead by winding ways
 To that green haunt and bay-environed maze,
 Where, in these summer days,
She early walks whose soul attracts me so.

Fool and forgetful ! Shall I cool desire
 By looking at those lovely eyes of hers,
 That passionate Love prefers
To his own brand for setting hearts on fire ?

O fool ! to dream that what began my pain
 Could end it ! Rather, noiseless, let me fly
 Out of her world, and die,
Where hopeless longing knows that all is vain.

OLD TREES.

“Où sont les gratieux gallans
Que je suyvoye au temps jadis,
Si bien chantans, si bien parlans,
Si plaisans en faictz et en dictz?”

FRANÇOIS VILLON.

MEN^r, long ago, whose faces, burning white,
Waxed pale about the lips with strong desire,
O women, ye whose hearts were like a fire
For love that found you not by day or night,
The saplings that first budded in your sight
Are ancient trees to-day whose tops aspire ;
The wind is in their leaves as in a lyre,
And sings the same old songs at dawning light !
This trunk I cannot span with outspread hands,
Perchance, an acorn, fell that very day
That Chaucer's white-throat lady past away ;
Or heard, a wand among the maze's wands,
The sobs of poisoned Rosamond where she lay
Fast dying in the heart of summer lands.

TO HENRIK IBSEN IN DRESDEN.

WITHIN the bowery window-nook,
My red azalea flowered to-day ;
Its colour fell upon the book
That I was reading where I lay,—
Your own sardonic masque of Love,
Wherein, when last azaleas blew,
I read, and marked the light above
Come faintly-tinted through.

And as your gracious verse unfolds
Its fluted meanings, leaf by leaf,
And knows not half the wealth it holds,
Till, gathered in a rosy sheaf,
The full-proportioned flowers of song
Flame, finished, from the perfect tree,
And pour out perfume, sweet and strong,
For all the world and me,—

So, now that May is well begun,
And cuckoos in the woodland shout,
My perfect flower that loves the sun
Will spread its faultless petals out ;
Each bloom will tell my heart of you,
Norse poet with the tropic heart,
From whose blind root there slowly grew
Such flowers of perfect art !

And while I wait for your new song
To waft its fragrance o'er the sea,
I hold the memories that belong
To you, to Norway and to me ;
I wander where the wild swan calls,
And where the dark lake lies and shines,
And watch sonorous waterfalls
Rush, whitening, through the pines.

You in the city of sweet names,
Where Raffaele and Correggio meet,—
I by the dismal-tided Thames,
In dreary square and sultry street,—
Both, by one magnet drawn, extend
Our thoughts across the northern deep,
Till both our beings mix and blend
Where jarls and vikings sleep.

So flies a bridge across the sea
From you to Norway, clear like glass ;
A mistier framework, built for me,
Permits my vaguer hopes to pass ;
One link remains unforged, one base
The wizard's weird triangle needs,
One ray to join us face to face,
And then our art succeeds.

That link between your land and mine,
My English and your Norse denies ;
Your verses lie like gems that hide
In coffers sealed from English eyes ;
Behind the veil we dimly know
A solemn figure stands complete,
But know not how the draperies flow,
How poise the hands and feet.

For me slow hours have drawn aside
The curtain that concealed the work ;
Diaphanous thin webs still hide,
And gauzy faint concealments lurk,
But all the gracious form displayed
Delights me with its sweeping lines,
And every day some progress made
Decreases what confines.

But oh ! to win my people's eyes
To stand with me—to gaze, admire,
To praise the statue's form and size,
That is the goal of my desire ;
But, friend, you dream not of the weight
Of insular phlegmatic pride,
The sturdy self-sufficient hate
Of all the world beside.

My England, where the grass is deep,
And burns with buttercups in May,
Whose brookside violets nod in sleep,
Washed purer purple by the spray ;
My England of the August corn,—
The heavy-headed waving gold,—
Sweet blossoming land from bourne to bourne,
Whose name and speech I hold,

Receives my homage ; none the less
I deem some precious things may be,
With which the sovereign Muses bless
The world outside our circling sea ;
Some unknown gift the gods may leave
To be enshrined in alien lands,
A boon we humbly must receive
From unfamiliar hands.

For you the slow revenge of time
 Will bring the meed your works have won,
When common speech from clime to clime
 Shall link the nations into one ;
The vast Republic of the arts
 Will crown your deathless fame with bays,
When our poor tongues and beating hearts
 Are dust on trodden ways.

For me what is there ? Just to sit
 Beneath my red azalea-tree,
Half in the sun, and flecked with it,
 And with flower-shadows, silently ;
To read the strong sonorous verse,
 And think, my poet, now and then,
How, though the times wax worse and worse,
 You walk the world of men.

Till this consoles me, for I know
 That though the nations, old and weak,
Tremble with change, and shivering so,
 With gathered voices shake and shriek,
You tremble not, but brave and strong,
 Pour forth as from a trumpet's mouth,
The great anathemas of song
 Sent northward from the south.

Work then in patience, till you see
The confines of your Holy Land,
That Palestine of poesy,
Where Agnes waits for you, and Brand ; *
Pull on with strenuous arm and oar,
The sandy bar will soon be past,
And grassy odours from the shore
Proclaim you home at last !

* The two most prominent figures in Ibsen's great satiric drama,
Brand.

D. G. R.

MASTER, whose very names have god-like power
Of song and light divine, being his who went
Unscathed through blearing fire omnipotent,
Singing for men ; and his who hour by hour
Stands in the imminent and splendid shower
Of God's effulgence ; and being lastly blent
With the warm light and odour effluent
Of your own rhymes, our latest, loveliest dower,
Not in our own land could my weakness mock
Your strength with homage of my poor May-day,
The applause of circling poets scared my song,
But here where twenty thousand thunders shock
The violent air for leagues of dim sea-way,
Surely my heart may speak, nor do you wrong !

Outside Bergen Harbour, Aug., 1871.

FORGOTTEN.

THAT long blue line that ends the sky
Is my forsaken home ;
At last, at last, a wayworn traveller, I
Come back to my own chilly heaven, to die
Under its cold grey dome.

There'll be no welcome on the shore,
No bright familiar face
Will laugh and rush to meet me from the door ;
I have no place nor portion any more
In my own land and race.

Only the patient dead, that sleep
Beside the birches on the hill,
Will know me coming from the wasteful deep,
Will let me sit before their graves and weep
Where all is old and still.

SPIRITUAL DAWN.

EASTWARD ever I, like Rudel,
Gaze in constant hope and silence
Waiting till my heart's sun-blossom
Rise upon a dreary world ;

For its leaves of light bear healing
To the wounds of my pale spirit,
And the cave of air grows ruddy
With the promise of that dawn.

As I murmured thus, the silence
Broke in such Memnonian music,
That I doubted now no longer,
Falling on my knees in prayer.

But when those sweet sounds were ended,
All the dawn-light, quivering, altered
Into crimson wings of angels,
Hovering over moor and sea.

And between their wings ethereal
Came, like muffled thunder, toning,
Words that whispered, Never, never,
 Shall that sun arise for thee !

Stars may light thy clear cold pathway,
Gracious moons in purple twilight,
But the sun of life shall never
 Rise for all thy prayers and tears !

FOR THE NEW YEAR.



THE short noon weeps that the hours are fleet
And hide the steps of the sun's bright feet ;

But the moon laughs low in the midnight sky,
For she sees the sun's face from her throne on high.

Behind the blank of the vapourous seas
Gleam still, as of old, the Hesperides.

The bloom of the rose-tree is withered and goes,
But a new flower sleeps in the root of the rose ;

And spring shall come with a flute and a fire,
And wake new passion and old desire.

The scarlet poppies shall flame and pass
Out of the clusters of cool young grass ;

The brook shall dance against warm green leaves
And the brown fields murmur with shocks and sheaves.

Out of the city that roars and cries
I send you a dream of delight of the eyes.

Out of the heart of the winter-time
I send you a leaf from the young year's prime.

Out of the toil and the trouble of night
I send you a song of the dawn's delight.

For all things die to arise again,
Save pain, and sorrow, the shadow of pain ;

And beyond the reach of the rack and rod
There remaineth a rest for the people of God.

1870—71.



THE year that Henri Regnault died,—
The sad red blossoming year of war,—
All nations cast the lyre aside,
And gazed through curv'd fingers far
At horror, waste and wide.

Not one new song from overseas
Came to us ; who had ears to hear ?
The kings of Europe's minstrelsies
Walked, bowed, behind the harrowing year,
Veiled, silent, ill at ease.

For us the very name of man
Grew hateful in that mist of blood ;
We talked of how new life began
To exiles by the eastern flood,
Flower-girdled in Japan.

We dreamed of new delight begun
 In palm-encircled Indian shoals,
Where men are coloured by the sun,
 And wear out contemplative souls,
 And vanish one by one.

We found no pleasure any more
 In all the whirl of Western thought ;
The dreams that soothed our souls before
 Were burst like bubbles, and we sought
 New hopes on a new shore.

The men who sang that pain was sweet
 Shuddered to see the masque of death
Storm by with myriad thundering feet ;
 The sudden truth caught up our breath,
 Our throats like pulses beat.

The songs of pale emaciate hours,
 The fungus-growth of years of peace,
Withered before us like mown flowers ;
 We found no pleasure more in these,
 When bullets fell in showers.

For men whose robes are dashed with blood,
What joy to dream of gorgeous stairs,
Stained with the torturing interludes
That soothed a Sultan's midday prayers,
In old days harsh and rude?

For men whose lips are blanched and white,
With aching wounds and torturing thirst,
What charm in canvas shot with light,
And pale with faces cleft and curst,
Past life and life's delight?

And when the war had passed, and song
Broke out amongst us once again,
As birds sing fresher notes among
The sunshot woodlands after rain,
And happier tones prolong,—

So seemed it with the lyric heart
Of human singers ; fresher aims
Sprang in the wilderness of art,
Serener pathos, nobler claims
On man for his best part.

The times are changed; not Schumann now,
But Wagner is our music-man,
Whose flutes and trumpets throb and glow
With life, as when the world began
Its genial ebb and flow.

The great god Pan redeified
Comes, his old kingship to reclaim;
New hopes are spreading far and wide;
The lands were purged as with a flame,
The year that Regnault died.

THE MANDRAKES.

A STUDY IN GROTESQUE.

Prorex. And whither must these flies be sent?

Oberon. To everlasting banishment.

The woods are yew trees, bent and broke
By whirlwinds ; here and there an oak
Half cleft with thunder. To this grove
We banish them.

Culprits. Some mercy, Jove !

Oberon. You should have cried so in your youth,
When Chronos and his daughter Truth
Sojourned among you ; when you spent
Whole years in riotous merriment."

DAY'S "*Parliament of Bees*," 1607.

WHETHER in meditation or in dream,
Or whether in the circle of known lands
I walked, I cannot tell ; the crested stream
Of the great waters breaking on the sands,
The far brown moors, the gulls in white-winged bands,
Seem too clear-coloured on my memory
To be the ghosts of any phantasy.

Along the sweep of an untrodden bay,
Towards a great headland that before me rose,
Full merrily I held my sunny way ;
And in that atmosphere of gold and snows,
And pure blue fire of air and sea, the woes
Of mortals and their pitiful despair
Seemed vague to my glad spirit void of care.

The long bluff rose against the sea, and thrust
Its storm-proof bosom far into the deep,
And many a breaker, many a roaring gust
Disturbed the calm of its primæval sleep,
Through the grey winter twilight ; there did creep
In swarthy trefoil, or salt-blighted grass,
A token where the uncurbed sea-wind did pass.

So even in the bright and pure June air
The place seemed vested in unholy guise.
The loneliness was like a pain to bear,
I sought about with strangely troubled eyes
For bird or flower to glad me in some-wise,
In vain ; then at the utmost verge I stayed
When far beneath the refluent thunders swayed.

Then as I stood upon the precipice
Drinking the sunlight and sharp air like wine,
I heard, or thought I heard, a murmur twice,—
First, like a far-off shrieking, clear and fine,
Then like an anxious shouting for a sign
To careless boatman steering o'er the rim
Of rocks,—but both behind me, and both dim.

But even while, not turning, in my mind
I thought how very lonely the place was,—
The rushing of the steadfast wings of wind
Being empty of all common sounds that pass,—
The song of birds, or sighing in the grass,—
Then suddenly a howl to rend the skies
From the bare land behind me seemed to rise.

And while my skin was wrinkled with affright,
I noticed far and far away, an isle,
With faintest waves of jagged pale blue light
Skirt the horizon, land not seen erewhile ;—
This in a flash of thought ; such sights beguile
Our hearts in wildest moments, and we know
Not clearly after how it could be so.

But in a second, ere the long shriek died,
I turned to see whence came this note of woe,
And marked on the down's topmost hollow wide
One lonely scrawling gnarled tree that did grow,
Coiling its leafless branches stunt and low,
Midmost the promontory ; thither I
Drawn by some hate-spell felt my way did lie.

It was a shameful tree, the twisted pain
Of its sad boughs and sterile hollow stem,
Took fearful forms of things that are man's bane,
And circling drops of oozings did begem
Its twigs with a dull poisonous anadem ;
It had no bright young leaves to tell of Spring,
Nor clustering moss that hallowed eld doth bring.

And at its foot were forms that had no shape,
Unmoving creatures twisted like the tree,
With horrid wooden faces set agape
And bodies buried in the earth ; to see
Such human features moulded terribly
Sent all the life-blood surging to my heart,
And mine own breath was ready to depart.

When one most awful visage bent the roots
That were its jaws, and moaning, slowly spake ;
“ O mortal, what assemblage of soft lutes
Rings now across the silvery waves that break
Along the city, where the shadows make
In tremulous calm lines of sunset fire
A magic image of each dome and spire ? ”

He questioned thus in strained voluptuous tones ;
His hideous feet deep in the ground were set ;
His body fashioned without skin or bones
Was like the mystic figure of smooth jet
Egyptian priests wore in an amulet,
What time they mourned Osiris ; like a shriek
His pained voice ended sharply, forced and weak.

Then when I answered nothing, once again
He spoke,—“ In what elysium of the blest,
Lapped in sweet airs, forgetful of all pain,
Fulfilling an eternity of rest,
Lies Titian, of all painters loved the best ?
Oh ! say, in any land where you have been,
Heard you of him and not of Aretin ? ”

“O matchless painter of the noble heart !

Dear friend I loved long centuries ago !
Lean from that golden chamber where thou art,
Above the sun and moon, and lighten so
The utter, endless agony of woe
That fills my wretched being, doomed for aye
Rooted in this foul living grave to stay.

“Ah, mortal, listen ! I was once a child

Into whose brain God poured the mystic wine,
Full of pure odours, fragrance undefiled,—
Keen drink to make a poet all divine.

I took the gift ; men called me Aretine :
All that was pure and poet-like I spurned,
And to hell-fire for inspiration turned.

“God suffered long with me, and let the fire

Of passionate youth burn to the ash of age,
Saying to the angels, ‘ Surely when desire
Is dead within him, his true heritage

Will seem more precious to him, and the page
Of the great book shall in the end record
Some prayer, some love, some tender-spoken word.

“Yet I, still impious, burned before my God
The rancid oil of hypocritic prayer,
And with unsanctified, rash footsteps trod
Those shadowy precincts, where the misty air
Is heavy with the sound of hymns, and rare
High spirit-breathings fill the solemn place
Where God meets man, in silence, face to face.”

I stood beneath the tree now, all the ground
Was full of these grim shadows of mankind,
And all in some way shamefully were bound
Into the earth, but no two could I find
In which the same quaint shapes were intertwined ;
But each was human, yet each had the feature
Of some mis-shapen thing or hideous creature.

Oh, how the calm around us, and the light
Of pure cerulean æther, full of sun,
Made awful contrast with the shameful blight
Of these foul natures ! Him I looked upon
Was like an old man, utterly undone,
With white thin locks, that blew about his eyes
Like grasses round a stump when summer dies.

Fear held my tongue ; I trembled like the leaves
That quiver when the gradual autumn falls
On shadowy Vallombrosa, and bereaves
The forest, full of flowery funerals,—
And all the windy places have their palls
Of yellow leafage, till the noiseless snow
Muffles the rustling of this gusty woe.

At last I murmured, “ Cannot rest or death
Forever visit this pale place of tombs?”
And ceased ; for, like the sound of a sharp breath
That from the drawn throat of one dying comes,
Whose heart the Master of all breath benumbs,
An answering voice arose, whose calm, intense,
Sad music won my ear with sharp suspense :

“ Not vervain, gathered when the dog-star rose,
Not agrimony, euphrasy, or rue,
Not any herb can bring our pain repose,
Nor any poison make our summers few ;
For ever our own agonies renew
Our wasted bodies still to suffer pain,
To suffer, pine, renew, and pine again.

“ Ah, turn away ! behold me not ! those eyes
Burn me like lightning with a searing shame ;
Gaze not upon these ghastly infamies,
That must deform me worse than maimed or lame,
The ribald children scoff at for their game ;
Ah ! in what jocund wise I danced and sung
Through the warm Tuscan nights, when life was young ;

“ These grey and shrunken fingers once were lithe
And meet for all most dainty handiwork ;
Whether a painted coffer for a blithe
Fair bride, or for the Caliph or Grand Turk
A golden chalice, where red wine might lurk
Coiled unforbidden ; or for monks’ dim eyes,—
Worked in distemper,—hell and paradise.

“ Ay me ! what lovely fancies I have wrought
In cloisters, or along a church’s wall,
Where in a high-fenced garden angels taught
Our Lady at her baby’s feet to fall ;
There, with his keys, went Peter ; there stood Paul,
With long brown beard, and leant upon his sword ;
And all the virgins, singing, praised the Lord.

“ But, best of all, I loved to stand and paint
His face who doubted when the Lord arose,—
Andrew, my ever-blessed patron saint,
Bearing his mighty cross, and worn with woes,
And pining sore from self-inflicted blows,—
His passionate, jealous, loving, hating heart,
Seemed every-way my very counterpart.

“ He is in glory now, and walks and sings
With saints who take his rough brown hand in theirs,
And sees the angels’ silver-spotted wings !
But I convulse the noon-day with my prayers,
And in the night-time blast the icy airs
With my shrill pains ; hearken for what offence
My soul was doomed to anguish so intense !

“ If one man’s art can be another’s bane,—
If half the swiftest runners miss the goal,—
If thinkers weave out holy thoughts in vain,
Which bless the world and ruin their own soul,—
If bitterness and langour be our dole,—
Why do we seek, so greedily, at all
Laurel, to poison our own brows withal ?

“All this is only vanity ; but, lo !

For weary years I slowly fought my way
High up the hill of fame, and should I go
Right sadly down again at fall of day,
Because this Domenic, this popinjay,
Could trick a wall out with a newer brush,
And after him all men began to rush ?

“When I grew poor, and no man came to me,

One night I lay awake, and by my bed
Heard a low, subtle voice, and seemed to see
A little demon, with a fiery head,
That whispered, ‘If now Domenic were dead,
And his new way dead with him, ha ! ha ! ha !
Luck would come back again to Andrea !’

“So one bright night when singing he went by

I watched him ; round his neck a chain of gold
Glittered and lured me like a serpent’s eye ;

It was the price of some new picture sold :
My nerves grew steel, my veins of fire throbbed cold,
My dagger smote him through the neck, charm-bound,
And like a snake, the chain slid to the ground.

“ Ay me ! ay me ! what cruel cruel pang
 Draws forth this tale of mine own infamy ;
Oh ! youth, by all the angel choirs that sang,
 Round holy Christ at his nativity,
 I pray thee mock me not, in charity,
Who for one hour of passion and fell spite
Must suffer endless torture infinite.”

Then at my side a voice cried, “ Look on me !
 Stamp on me, crush me, grind me with your heel !
I, even I, this shapeless thing am he
 That slandered Sappho ! Set on me the seal
 Of your undying hatred, let me feel,
Even though I burn with anguish, that men know
Her holy life was ever pure as snow.”

Then flattened out, I saw upon the ground
 What seemed the hide of some mis-shapen beast,
With a pinned cord to bind it twisted round ;
 But lo ! its heart in beating never ceased,
 And now the flutter of its breath increased,
Barring its body of unhealthy hue
With lurid waves of mingling green and blue.

“Of old,” a stifled voice proclaimed, “I dwelt
Deep in the cedar-shades of that high hill,
Whose brow looks down on Lesbos, and the belt
Of sun-lit sea, where rippling laughter fill
The spaces down to Chios ; thither still
As gold above the Lydian mountains shone
Sappho would climb to dream and muse alone.

“How oft her wind-swept hair and kindling eyes
I watched, unseen, within my own rose-bowers,
Her cheek that glowed at her heart’s phantasies,
Bright as the reffluent flush of fields of flowers
Stirred by the light feet of the flying hours,
When, about sunrise, on a morn of May,
Westward they troop, and herald the young day !

“So fair was she in my conceit ; but soon
Her songs were sung from Lesbian town to town,
And other islands claimed the lyric boon,
And Andros praised, and Paros sent a crown,
And reverend men, in philosophic gown,
From Greece, from sage Ionia, came to lay
At Sappho’s feet the homage of a day,

“ Then in my heart the love I bore her grew
 To foulest envy, like the bitter core
That lies in the sweet berry of the yew ;
 For I, too, fashioned for the lute, and bore
 Such ivy-wreaths as would-be poets wore ;
But never ode of mine did men repeat,
Singing for glee along the broad white street.

“ It happed that through the islands I must go
 To gather tribute, and where'er I came
The youths and girls would gather round to know
 What news of Sappho, till my heart became
 Shrivelled and parched with spite as with a flame,
And evermore I set my subtle tongue
To hint and whisper nameless tales of wrong.

“ And soon all lands rang out with that ill-fame,
 For little souls delight to think the worst
Of sovereign spirits who have won great name
 For virtue or for wit, so all men nursed
 And spread the rumour of these tales accursed,
Which smouldered, far from Lesbos, till she died,
Then burst in lurid flames unsanctified.

“So to this limbo my unholy spirit
Was dragged by demons when my pulses sank,
And here forever shall my flesh inherit
More pain than ever human body drank.
See this bruised head, this haggard arm and shank,
The slow contracting pain of centuries
Has drawn the bones into this hideous guise.”

Then silence came, save far away the sound
Of waves that rang like timbrels in the air,
Dashing and dying on the shore, steel-bound ;
I stood above those lurid shapes in prayer,
Desiring that, if any hope there were,
Quickly their souls and bodies might decay,
And to the sovereign waters fade away.

For to my thought the moaning, sighing sea
Seemed yearning to receive them to its breast,
And fain would let its huge embraces be
Their haven of forgetfulness and rest ;—
“O let them die !” I murmured ; “It is best !
Have they not fed on anguish all their years ?
And drenched the morsel in the wine of tears ?

“ Their pains are greater than the Titan’s were,
Hung, a god-man, a sign to man and God,
For his immortal spirit was aware
Of its own immortality, and trod
With head erect beneath the oppressor’s rod,
But these are bitten through with their own shame,
And scorcht with infamy as with a flame.

Wherefore, if Heaven forbid not, let them die !”

The echo of my accents broke in moans
From all the grim and stark fraternity
*That lay in heaps about my feet like stones ;
Down to the caverns of my heart their groans
Sank, as a meteor, breeding death and woe,
Slants down the skies on weeping lands below.

Then all the silence grew a mighty sound,
Gathering in voice along the nether sea,
As when in some Norwegian gulf profound
Sailors, becalmed along the monstrous lee
Of desolate Torghatten, hear the glee
Of many a riotous and rebel wind,
Deep in the mountain’s riven heart confined.

With murmuring of immortal wings it came

Blown by no wind, and moaned along the deep,
Then hung at last above that place of shame

On plumes of sound, like some great bird asleep,—
Though o'er the blue no cloud nor stain did creep,—
And slowly gave in words articulate
All the vast utterance of the unseen fate.

O thou grave mystic, who, by inner light,

Didst watch the ruddy, throbbing life in flowers,
And shaken by no pitiful affright,

Held'st converse with the eternal starry powers;
By all the bliss in full ecstatic hours,
From spirit-tongues, to thee, a spirit, given,
Bow down and aid me from thy lucent heaven !

Blake, loveliest of the sons of shadowy light,

Throned, with dawn-mist for purple, sun for gold,—
Regent above us in all true men's sight,

Among thy kindred angel-ranks enrolled,—
Think not thy latest lover overbold,
If in sore need he for a while prolong
Prayer for thy aid in his most arduous song !

For he must murmur what a spirit sang,
Lisp the weird words no mortal can pronounce ;
For all about my head the air now rang
With the dread clarion Voice, that did denounce
The writhing things, and bid my heart renounce
Pity and grief, and drown in obloquy
All hope for these, still dying and to die.

“ No temple, and no tripod, and no shrine
Is half so sacred as the soul of man,
Lit with a flame more subtle, more divine,
Than that which round the glimmering altar ran,
With mutterings and with thunders, when the clan
Of Baal-prophets howled, and sank down dead
On the cold parapet their life-blood fed.

“ Man is himself the lamp for hallowed use,
The oil that feeds it and the hand that lights,
Each to his brother is the plenteous cruse,
And in the universal gift unites ;
So all combine, with sacrificial rites,
Throughout the gleaming world, from bound to bound,
To spread the wealth that old Prometheus found.

“And so should all things slowly climb up higher
Into the perfectness of utter rest,
And no least breath of passion stir the fire
That fell from God and burneth in man’s breast ;
By his own purity should man be blest,
The soul being priest, and worshipper, and shrine,
Bearing God’s presence for an outward sign.

“But ah ! what punishment would not be meet
To scourge that ribald priest, that should defile
The lintel of his own God’s mercy-seat ;
Or who, with nimble fingers and smooth wile,
Should from the prostrate worshippers beguile
The sacred gifts of balsam or of myrrh,
To burn in sport where harlot-loves confer ?

“Would the vexed God be pitiful and meek,
Nor smite the impious with a thunder-bolt,
Clothing the lingering life and hollow cheek
With pain as with a garment ? Let the dolt
Go whine and whimper over heath and holt,—
Shall any lovers of the God be found
Whose hearts shall melt with pity at the sound ?

“Wherefore, if all things sacred, all things pure,
All that makes life worth living for to men,
While chastity, and faith, and honour sure,
Have in your heart their answering echoes, then
Cease to be wise above a mortal ken,
And judge that we, whose robes are virtues, know
Where justice rules, and mercy may not go.”

As from the heart's-core of a trumpet-blast
May rise the melody of whispering flutes,
A softer music on my ear was cast,
Even as I lay among those living roots,
And heard their direful sentence, and the fruits
Of their insane rebellion ; sweet and far
As orchard-singing under a pale star,

That tender fluting rose, but, gathering strength,
Thrilled like a hundred instruments in tune,
Here soft citoles, and here in liquid length
The sobbing of tense harp-strings, and all soon
Rounded with murmurs of the full bassoon,
And all words faded, and I rose, and lo !
A lady standing on the hill of woe.

Adown her shoulders, over the broad breast,
A saffron robe fell lightly to her feet,
Edged quaintly with meander ; for the rest,
Her changeful eyes were wonderfully sweet,
Sea-coloured, and her braided hair made meet
Under a fillet of starred myrtle-flowers,
More large and pure than any bloom of ours.

Her face was even as apple-blossom is,
When first the winds awaken it ; her mouth
Seemed like the incarnation of a kiss ;
A philtre for all sorrows ; in heart-drouth
A fountain breathing of the fragrant south ;
A cage for songs ;—a violin—who knows ?
Perchance the rose-tree of the world's great rose !

Kalliope, the eternal Muse, she hight,
Whose lips woke music in Mæonides,
Through all the alternatives of day and night,
Silence and song, that this poor wan world sees,
She walks unchanged, while old divinities
Wither and die, and new creeds spring and fall,
And new flowers hear the new-born cuckoos call.

There in her loveliness she stood and spread
Her arms out to me in most smiling wise,
Saying, "Oh, my servant, in such drearied,
Why floats thy spirit in a wind of sighs?
What ruth and passion gather to thine eyes?
What part hast thou with these? Ah! wayward child,
Should I be clement to them?" And she smiled.

O! what a smile! But when she ceased, once more
I cast my eyes upon the twisted features;
And all the pity that my heart once bore
To watch the writhing of the loathsome creatures
Fled from me, for their foul degenerate natures
Scowled under those pure eyes of hers, as hell
Must blacken, seen from heaven's white pinnacle.

She vanished. Then they howled and howled until
The cave of air, devoid of other sound,
Was full of moaning echoes round the hill;
Then with my hands my aching ears I bound,
And rushing from that cruel cursed ground,
From cleft to cleft leapt downwards to the sea,
Where faint wave-music was as balm to me.

AD AUDITOREM.

*NIGHTS canker feeds upon the day's white rose,
This book of verse must have a sorry close ;
So leaf by leaf the flowers of joy decay,
And song by song the poet wins repose.*

*Yea ! rest at last from life and life's delight,
Where dreamless faces throng the courts of night,
When softly down his tired limbs he may lay
Where pallid marbles and dark slabs invite.*

*There you and I at last will have to go,
And if this book previene us there or no,
'Tis but the difference of a year or twain
If we or it find earlier sleep below.*

*Rise up and come ; the iron-coloured breast
Of 'sombre sea resumes its old unrest ;
The air is full of thunderous sounds of rain,
The pale flowers tremble, bowing toward the west.*

*I sing of love and sunshine, but my breath
Is all too weak to sing of night and death ;
The sweet dark hours have found us unawares,
The solemn air around us sorroweth.*

*Before we go, I pluck the leaves that lie
Most near to where we nestled, you and I ;
Behold this knot of flowering grass ! It bears
An arcane sense of what it is to die.*

*Here, under shining stars and dropping dews,
The failing life of grasses Death renews,
Mows them and heaps them to be born again,
And gives them back the green delight they lose.*

*These pale brown roots and feathery tips may know
More truth of what time brings us here below,
More wisdom far of life and change and pain,
Than all the schoolmen arguing to and fro.*

*One thing is sure, like flower of grass we fade,
Of crumbling clay and dust our lives are made ;
O would it were as sure that we return
As that new leafage springs from leaves decayed !*

*Howe'er it be, find somewhere in your breast
A place to lay these tender roots to rest,
And, if you have a kindly heart to learn,
Their presence may not leave you all unblest.*

*Death comes, uncalled or wished for, late or soon,
To all men wandering underneath the moon,
But some few years are left for love and song,—
Take heed we do not waste the thrifty boon !*

*With strength to hold one lover and one friend
Through life, and on till fleeting life shall end,
I care not whether time be short or long,
Nor heed what grief the envious Fates may send.*

*And if the words my page has sung to-day
Have touched your heart or charmed one care away,
They were not rhymed in vain ; and for the rest,
What matters what the passing world may say ?*

*But if you find my verses harsh and slow,
Yet bow your head and hear my heart below
Beat warm and true within my tuneless breast,
Then rise and touch my hand and let us go.*

THE END.



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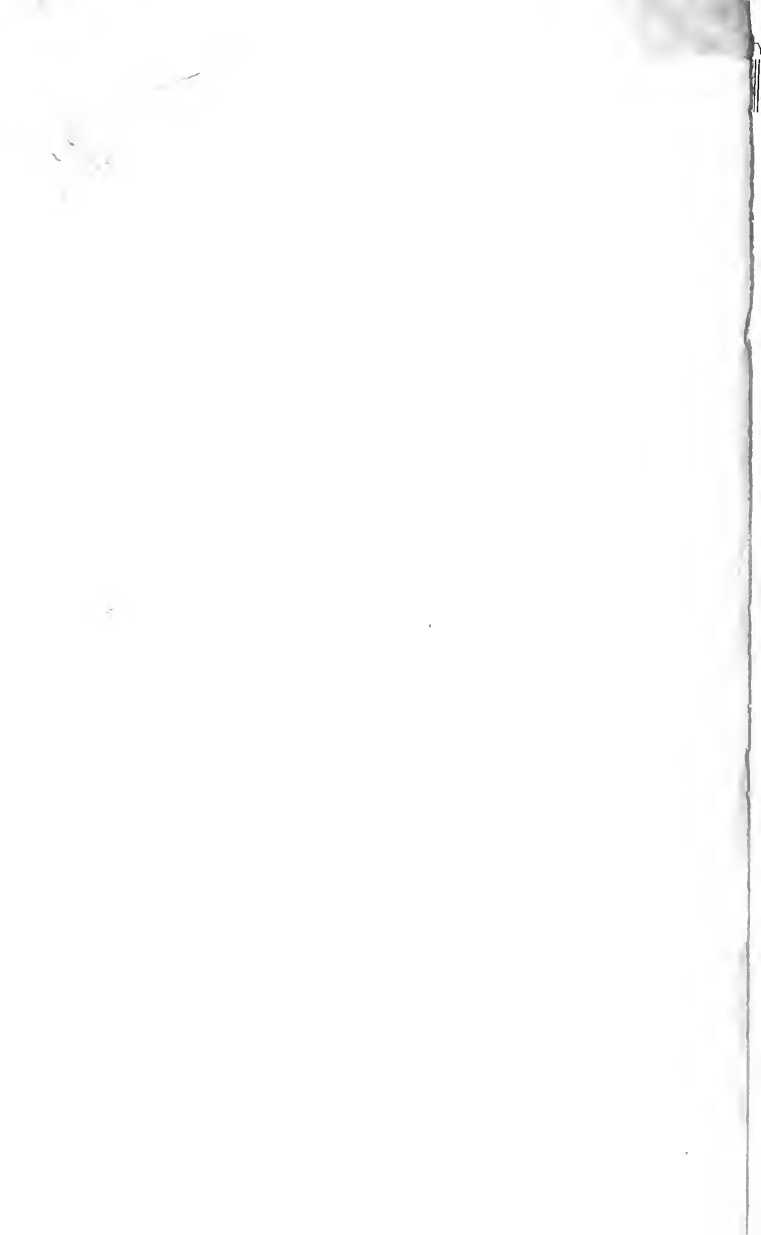
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